

CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE:

*The Baptism That Demonstrates
The Faith That Justifies*

BOYD LAMMIMAN

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New International Version (1978 edition) used throughout unless otherwise specified.

NIV New International Version
NASV New American Standard Version
ASV American Standard Version
KJV King James Version

~~REC-116~~ BV 811.2 .L3

Lammiman, Boyd, 1919-

Caught in the crossfire

ISBN 1-56794-074-9

Star Bible Publications
Fort Worth, Texas 76182

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PREFACE

Many years ago one of my students who had been around the college eleven years before he finally graduated signed up for his last semester. To assist him work out the two hours course credit he lacked to complete his program, we set up a "reading and conference" course. The student was to meet weekly in my office for discussion of assignments. What to study? Why not baptism--after all, everybody has all sorts of ideas on the subject. By the third session, I realized I needed to study to keep ahead of the student. This began a study sojourn, the results of which constitute this book.

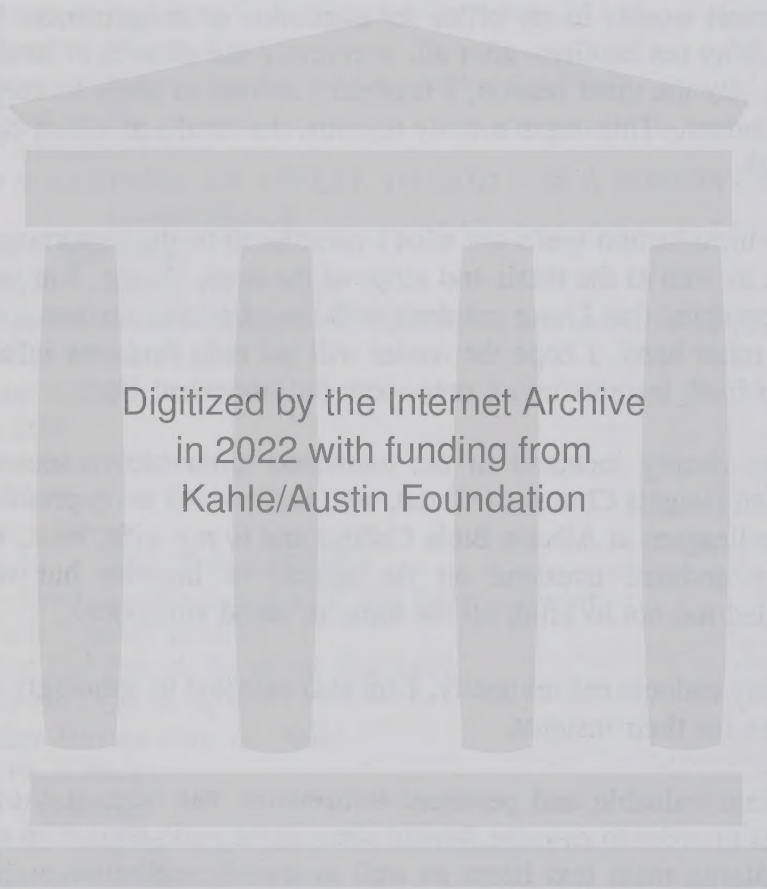
The introduction spells out what I consider to be the importance of the subject, as well as the thesis and scope of the book. Some, I'm sure, will be disappointed that I have not dealt with their favorite baptism subtopics. On the other hand, I hope the reader will not only find new information but also fresh insights into a time-worn but important topic.

I am deeply indebted to the numerous adult bible classes at the Cambrian Heights Church of Christ, who endured my early presentations; to my colleagues at Alberta Bible College and to my wife, Julia, who has patiently endured overload on the subject of baptism but who has counselled me not to bring up the topic in social situations!

As my endnote entries testify, I am also indebted to seemingly myriads of others for their insights.

Certain valuable and pertinent information has been stashed in the endnotes in order to ease the flow of ideas in the main text. The endnotes often enlarge main text items as well as introduce discussion of other, related themes.

Boyd Lammiman



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INTRODUCTION

When Solomon wrote that of the making of books there is no end and that much study is a weariness of the flesh, he must have been reading about baptism! So why another study on baptism? When it comes to baptism, I've about decided, as Solomon himself might have said, that there is "nothing new under the sun." So why another study?

It isn't enough to sing, "The way of the cross leads home." The question that plagues Christendom is, what is that way? It isn't enough to acknowledge the finished work of Christ on the cross of Calvary and that we're saved by the blood. Believers still want to know how this happens. Either baptism is part of man's response for salvation or it is not. For this reason alone, the topic is important.

For me, it's been exciting to find that faith and baptism are not only found together in accounts of New Testament conversions but that baptism, according to scripture, actually explains (demonstrates) the faith that justifies. In my journey, I've developed a much greater understanding of both faith and obedience. The latter, I've found, includes but is more than just doing what we're told. I've also come to realize that baptism is more than a mere ritual. I've been confronted with whether baptism is a sacrament. I've been confronted with whether baptism is a "work" in relation to salvation. In fact, I'm convinced that baptism, after its first century introduction, got caught in the cross fire of theological controversy. And although in most arenas of church life there is now a cease fire of sorts, there is much unrest on the part of many believers--both professionals and the rest. I've also learned what happened in history to pull faith and baptism apart and what has kept them apart. On a topic so frequently mined over so many years, I would be presumptuous to say that the study is completely unique. Nevertheless, it just may be that the insights I share will be as fresh to the serious student as they've been to me and may not be found elsewhere in similar combination.

My own conclusion is this: Baptism saves by Jesus Christ resurrected and exalted, not because it is a ritual that in itself confers divine blessings (a sacrament) nor because it is a deed worthy of divine reward (a "work"), but because it explains (demonstrates) the faith that justifies and

by which one receives the Spirit and because it is an appeal to God for a good or forgiven conscience.

I hope to develop this viewpoint from scripture.

En route to this conclusion, I propose that we examine the faith that justifies. What we think about faith makes a huge difference what we think about baptism. We'll ask, other than a ritual, what is baptism? Is it a "sacrament" in the classical sense? What's the connection between sacrament and the "mystery religions"? Where does the idea of sacrament come from? Why is baptism, biblically speaking, not a "work"? Do those who speak of faith alone in relation to salvation mean "faith-all-by-itself"? What do faith and baptism have in common? How does baptism into Christ explain the faith that justifies? According to scripture, what purposes or ends does baptism fulfill? What is the "one baptism"? How does water baptism relate to baptism in the Holy Spirit? Why may it be said that baptism is an appeal to God for a forgiven conscience? And, finally, some baptism passages don't indicate the element in which the baptism either occurred or will occur. By what criteria or standards do we decide whether in passages like Acts 2: 38 and Romans 6 it's water or Holy Spirit baptism? Finally, we'll observe that baptism is a Christ-centered event.

The book, then, will deal with baptism--both water baptism and baptism in the Spirit. Because baptism has been caught in the cross fire of theological controversy; we will, from time to time, make reference to these influences. History informs us how faith and baptism became separated. Many themes along the way deserve and are capable of greater development. I hope I will have touched upon them sufficiently, however, to help the reader to sense their relevance to our primary topic, bible baptism.

Boyd Lammiman

ABBREVIATIONS

CYCLOPEDIAS AND DICTIONARIES

BDTh	Baker's Dictionary of Theology
HDB	Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible
HERE	Hastings' Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics
ISBE	International Standard Bible Encyclopedia
MSC	M'Clintock & Strong Cyclopedia
NSHE	New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia

BOOKS

Alford	Henry Alford, The Greek Testament, with revision by Everett F. Harrison (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958)
Angus	S. Angus, The Mystery-Religions and Christianity (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925)
Bainton	Roland H. Bainton, The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958)
Bausch	William J. Bausch, A New Look at the Sacraments (Revised Edition; Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1983)
Beasley-Murray	G.R. Beasley-Murray, Baptism in the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962)
Belcastro	Joseph Belcastro, The Relationship of Baptism to Church Membership (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1963)
Berkouwer	G.C. Berkouwer, The Sacraments, Hugo Bekker, trans. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969)
Boatman	Russell E. Boatman, What the Bible Says About the Church (Joplin: College Press, 1985)
Bridge and Phypers	Donald Bridge and David Phypers, The Waters That Divide (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977)
Calvin	John Calvin, Commentary Upon the Acts of the Apostles, Christopher Fetherstone, trans. (1585), ed. by Henry Beveridge. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981)
Cottrell	Jack Cottrell, in Baptism and the Remission of Sins, ed. by David W. Fletcher (Joplin: College Press, 1990)

- Cullmann Oscar Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament*, tr. J.K.S. Reid (London: SCM Press, 1964)
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- England Stephen J. England, *The One Baptism* (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1960)
- Fuller Daniel P. Fuller, *Gospel and Law: Contrast or Continuum?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980)
- Grudem Wayne A. Grudem, in *The First Epistle of Peter of the Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, Reprinted 1989, ed. Leon Morris (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988)
- Harrison Everett F. Harrison, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962)
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- Mosheim John Lawrence Von Mosheim, *Institutes of Ecclesiastical History Ancient and Modern*, Vol. I, *The History of the Christian Church From the Death of Christ to Constantine the Great*, trans. James Murdock (New York: Robert Carter, 1881)
- Robertson A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1933)
- Tasker R.V.G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to John of The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, ed. R.V.G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960)
- Warfield Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation* (Revised Edition; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), pp. 18-20.
- Warns Johannes Warns, *Baptism, Studies in the Original Christian Baptism--Its History and Conflicts in Relation to a State or National Church*, trans. G.H. Lang. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1957)

LEXICONS

- Bauer** Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Translated by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich. (Second Edition; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979)
- Friedrich** Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Gerhard Friedrich (ed.). Geoffrey W. Bromiley (ed. and trans.) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971)
- Moulton and Milligan** James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1930])
- Thayer** Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: American Book Company, 1889)
- Vine** W.E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words in Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Old Testament edited by F.F. Bruce. (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1981.)

Apart from journals, the above also serves as a partial bibliography.

Chapter One

WHICH IS IT?

What does baptism have to do with salvation? "Nothing." "No way," say some Protestants. "Salvation is by faith alone." What does baptism have to do with salvation? "Everything," say Roman Catholics. "No one can get to heaven without it, including infants. It's a sacrament."¹ Certain Protestant groups agree.²

Scripture, however, says we're justified by faith and that baptism saves.
"Justified by Faith"

We're justified by faith. We're indebted to the apostle Paul for recording it and to Martin Luther for recovering it:

. . . in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith (Romans 1: 17)."

Or, as the KJV reads: "The just shall live by faith." (See also Galatians 3:11.)

It is ". . . not by works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to his mercy he saved us, through the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly, through Jesus Christ our Savior; that, being justified by his grace, we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3: 5-7 ASV).

Justified. Made right with God. Forgiven. Empowered by the Spirit to live godly in this present world.

"Baptism Saves"

Scripture also says, baptism saves:

. . . baptism now saves you--not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience--through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him (1 Peter 3: 21, 22 NASV).³

On Pentecost, this same apostle Peter, by the same Holy Spirit, brought the first gospel sermon, and said the same basic thing: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven (Acts 2: 38)."⁴

Before he left to sit at the right hand of his Heavenly Father, Jesus had told his disciples, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved (Mark: 16: 16)."

Later on, Saul, known to us as the apostle Paul, was told: "Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name (Acts 22: 16)."

Baptism saves, says scripture.

Which is it?

So which is it? Do we have to choose? Are these topics of saving faith and baptism really poles apart? Bible baptism, it seems, has gotten caught in the cross fire of theological controversy.

One writer sought to clarify matters saying that while justification is often attributed to faith, it is never attributed to baptism. As if the justification that follows faith is separate from the salvation that follows baptism. The truth is, justification is merely--though importantly--one aspect of our salvation.⁵

Baptism Saves?

With baptism in mind, Ambrose Bierce, almost a hundred years ago, quipped that the Flood was "a notable experiment which washed away the sins (and the sinners) of the world." Baptism has been made the butt of jokes; in local interdenominational "Ministerials" it's either joked about or not talked about. Among theologians, it's been debated, dissected, quartered and drawn. Civil governments have deemed it a civil crime if done wrong. In the Medieval Inquisition, baptismal irregularities were punished by excommunication from the Church and/or death. Denominations have been formed. Congregations have been divided. And brotherhood among Christians has been slashed. Clearly, as Bridge and Phypers write, baptism has become "the water that divides."⁶

It wasn't always that way.

For fifteen centuries, the church understood that baptism was for the remission of sins.⁷ Only when the Medieval Church had developed the sacramental viewpoint, did church leaders begin in a significant way to shun the rite in relation to salvation. Furthermore, it wasn't until the end of the second century that the term "sacrament" even showed up in reference to baptism. (Where did the idea come from in the first place?)

Differing Views--Why?

So why do Roman Catholics and certain Protestant groups say that baptism has everything to do with salvation but other Protestants say no to baptism and salvation? What's this all about?

HUMANITY SPIRITUALLY DEPRAVED

At the time of the Protestant Reformation, many believed that mankind was wholly incapable of exercising faith. That he was incapable of exercising repentance. That he was incapable of obedience. His will was "perverted at its very root." "Whosoever will," in the usual sense, was out; it wasn't an acceptable proposition. In this viewpoint, mankind's will was presumed to be freed by what is dubbed "regenerating grace." In other words, without divine, miraculous, supernatural intervention, the human being could not believe, could not repent, could not obey.⁸

BAPTISM, A SACRAMENT

For sacramentalists, the answer to mankind's alleged spiritual depravity was the concept of baptism as sacrament. By the very mechanics of the act itself, baptism was considered an instrument by which God confers His grace--at baptism, faith is infused into infant candidates.⁹

The Early Protestant Reformers--both Lutherans and Anglicans, especially the High Church party¹⁰--tended to follow the Roman Catholics in ascribing sacramental power to the baptismal waters.¹¹ Although Luther held that the sacrament was a means by which the Holy Spirit effected regeneration or produced faith in infants¹² he insisted that baptism's efficacy was not in the water itself but in the presence or preaching of the Word of God.¹³ (Luther had spurned Roman Catholicism's concept of *ex opere operato*, the notion that there is inherent power in the ritual.)¹⁴

SACRAMENTAL CONCEPT REJECTED

For the Middle Reformers--Zwingli and Calvin, the answer to humanity's spiritual depravity was saving faith miraculously infused. Although they employed the term "sacrament," they rejected baptism as a ritual that in itself brings salvation.¹⁵ Salvation is by faith alone and faith, a miraculous gift.¹⁶ Membership in the Body of Christ--the "invisible church"--is not, they said, by baptism but by regeneration by the mysterious operation of the Holy Spirit. (I discuss the place of the Spirit in bringing us into the Body of Christ, in chapter ten.) Regeneration by the Holy Spirit, membership in the Body; then baptism,

they said. Baptism, allegedly a "sign" of regeneration and membership already accomplished, is simply an act of reception into the visible church.¹⁷

The net result of these historic tensions between sacramentalists and the rest? Faith and baptism become separated. How they got pulled apart and how they've been kept apart, are matters of record. We'll look at these developments in a moment. Before that, however: Faith and baptism are found together in biblical commands, teaching passages and in numerous examples of New Testament conversions.

Faith and Baptism in Scripture

Faith and baptism are related in biblical commands. Mark 16:15,16 speaks of faith and baptism. Acts 16:31 speaks of faith, then baptism (verse 33). One of the teaching passages about baptism is Colossians 2:12.¹⁸ The American Standard Version speaks clearly of faith at the time of baptism. . . and earlier, no doubt: ". . . baptism, wherein [in which] ye were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead." Another teaching passage is Galatians 3: 27 where baptism explains the faith mentioned in verse 26. From the book of Acts come numerous examples of faith and baptism. Acts 2:41 speaks of faith (they "accepted his message"), then baptism. In 8: 12, 13, it's faith then baptism. Chapter sixteen, verses 14 and 15 speak of faith (they "gave heed"/they "responded"), then baptism. Verse 33 tells of the baptism of the Philippian jailor and his household. Verse 34 speaks of faith before baptism--they were filled with joy "because they had come to believe in God." It's faith, then baptism. Acts 8:37 and 18: 8 also speak of faith, then baptism.

Biblical references to baptism always place faith at or before baptism. Never after baptism.

Where Do We Go From Here?

We've sought to understand why some say that baptism is everything to salvation and others have said no. For some, the answer to mankind's spiritual "depravity" was sacrament. For others, it was salvation by faith alone. Chapter two tells how faith and baptism, which are found together in scripture, became separated.

ENDNOTES

1. The Roman Catholic position on the necessity of baptism is spelled out by P. J. Hill in "Infant Baptism," NCE, II, 63b, 64a.
2. According to H.G. Wood, "Baptism (Later Christian)" HERE, II, 401a, the position

- of the Anglican Church is that baptism is "ordinarily, though not absolutely necessary." For Luther, baptism was necessary--unless circumstances made it impossible. See George N.M. Collins, "Infant Salvation," BDTh, p. 285 and Augsburg Confession, I, ix, quoted in Jewett, p. 78.
3. According to context, the topic is water baptism. Not all baptism passages, however, clearly and definitely specify water or the Holy Spirit as the element in which the action occurs. How can we decide in such obscure cases? See Addendum A: "Is it Water Baptism or is it Holy Spirit Baptism?" for a suggestion which may be helpful.
Observe also that the apostle in 1 Peter 3: 21 speaks of baptism, which is more than the ritual itself. See chapter four for discussion, "Baptism, a Result."
 4. Bill D. Hallsted reports that this wording for Acts 2:38 in the New International Version was changed by the third edition (1984) due to marketing pressures, without consulting the translation committee. "Is Baptism Essential?", The Christian Standard, CXXVI (March 3, 1991), p. 5.
 5. See James I. Packer, "Just, Justify, Justification," BDTh, pp. 303ff. In the same work, see also Carl W. Wilson, "Sanctify, Sanctification," p. 470.
To appreciate the kinship between these two terms, salvation and justification, see Romans 1: 16, 17 where (verse 16) the apostle speaks of salvation for every believer, then affirms this salvation by faith with his reference to justification by faith.
 6. Bridge and Phypers, p. 109.
Stephen J. England, pp. 58ff., discusses how variations in baptismal practice and divergence concerning baptism's meaning seriously affect both denominational life as well as ecumenical discussions.
 7. Cottrell, "The Biblical Consensus: Historical Backgrounds to Reformed Theology," Chapter One, p. 28. See also a similar statement from Harnack, History of Dogma, Eng. tr., Vol. II, p. 140 quoted in HERE: Wood, 390b.
 8. For the Roman Catholic position, see E.M. Burke, "Grace," NCE, pp. 660ff. For that of Lutherans, see J. Theodore Mueller, "Lutheranism," BDTh, p. 335. For that of Reformed theology, see James I. Packer, "Freedom, Free Will," BDTh, p. 230. For that of Anabaptists, who held that humanity possess freedom of the will, see Gregg Singer, "Anabaptists," BDTh, p. 40.
 9. V. Norskov Olsen, "The Recovery of Adult Baptism," Ministry, LI (September 1978), p. 11. See also Hill, 69ff.
 10. "Baptism," MSC, I (1890), 645b.
 11. Jewett, 75. For a brief but helpful discussion of the distinctive attitudes of the Roman Church, Reformed churches and Lutherans concerning the efficacy of sacraments, see J.C. Lambert, "Sacraments," ISBE, 2637b. There he distinguishes the divergent doctrines of sacrament's efficacy: Roman Catholicism has its *ex opere operato* (see two "crucial terms," chapter two); Reformed doctrine denies efficacy in the outward act but calls for faith. Lutheranism ascribes efficacy to baptism but regards faith as necessary. (Note: In all three, faith may be that of someone other than the candidate.)
It is this efficacy for baptism in Romanism and Lutheranism, apart from personal

response by the candidate, that underscores the sacramental concept. For Luther, baptism is water with the Word--the promise of salvation according to Mark 16: 16. (Dillenberger, 293.1) Faith, he said, merely receives this baptism which God offers. (232) (God, by human hands, baptizes. 296, 297) Luther's tendency toward the sacramental shows up, however, when he insists that faith is not necessarily personal. See Endnote 13, chapter six.

12. See W.H.T. Dau, "Baptismal Regeneration," *Lutheran Doctrine*, ISBE, I, 398b, 399a. See also Bridge and Phipers, 52.
13. Dau, *Ibid.* See also Dillenberger, pp. 230ff.
14. See Bridge and Phipers, pp. 108, 109. Despite his rejection of *ex opere operato* and his claim that baptism's efficacy came from the presence of the Word, Luther demonstrated a sacramental viewpoint when he said that at baptism, faith is produced in infants.
15. Anabaptists also denied baptism's sacramental character. G.W. Forell, "Anabaptists," NCE, I, 459a. According to Hill, p. 70a, they seem to have denied original sin. In *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, p. 130, however, Simons speaks of humanity being "wholly depraved." Quoted in Jewett, 171.
16. Georg [sic] Steitz, "Baptism," NSHE, I (1908), 206a.
17. Cottrell, "Baptism According to the Reformed Tradition," Chapter Two, pp. 60-63, 68ff.
18. The Colossian epistle deals with the person and work of Christ and its relationship to the holiness of the church. In the context of verse 12, which deals with baptism, the apostle speaks of the fullness of the Deity which dwells in Christ (verse 9). He then reminds the Colossian Christians that they have been given this fullness (verse 10). In Christ, Christians have experienced a spiritual circumcision, a cutting off of spiritual uncleanness (verse 11). How this relates to baptism is discussed in chapter eight concerning Colossians 2:11,12.

Chapter Two

FAITH AND BAPTISM BECOME SEPARATED

Faith and baptism are not only found together in scripture. In chapter four, we'll also see how they belong together--how baptism explains the faith that justifies. Meanwhile, how did they get pulled apart and how have they been kept apart?

Pulled Apart by "Sacrament"

Faith and baptism got pulled apart by the sacramental concept.

In a bit of dry humor, Bierce defined sacrament as "A solemn religious ceremony to which several degrees of authority and significance are attached. "Rome," he said, "has seven sacraments, but the Protestant churches, being less prosperous, feel that they can afford only two, and those of inferior sanctity. Some of the smaller sects have no sacraments at all--for which miserly economy they will indubitably be damned."

So what is a sacrament? It's usually defined as a means of grace; is it any more than this?¹ Where did the concept come from? Is baptism a sacrament?

In New Testament times, the Latin *sacramentum* had two major uses in every daily life: (a) the term referred to something taken over for sacred purposes, such as monies paid at heathen temples (a religious usage) or (b) the term referred to an oath of obedience (a military usage). But it wasn't until the end of the second century that the term sacrament showed up in reference to baptism.²

As the notion of "mystery" crept into the church,³ sacrament came to mean a ritual that in itself, regardless of personal faith in the candidate, had "efficacy" (effectiveness/ brings results) in bringing God's favors to pass.⁴ This is the sense that has become the classic or traditional usage, around which controversy has swirled for centuries.⁵ (This meaning for sacrament will be in mind throughout our study.)

BAPTISM AS A SACRAMENT

In Roman Catholic theology concerning sacrament, two terms are crucial. One is "efficacy," the other is a Latin phrase, *ex opere operato*. Before you wilt in the presence of these awesome expressions, let's see what they mean. In the early 1500's, the Roman Catholic Council of Trent pronounced the sacraments to be efficacious--effective, that is, in

bringing something to pass. As signs, they are not simply symbols but are considered a means by which God's grace is brought to mankind. They give grace of themselves, it is said.⁶ They contain the grace or divine favor that they signify.

Ex opere operato, also adopted by the Council of Trent, simply means something "done by the deed." Applied to baptism it means that the deed, baptism, in itself, does something--it effects or brings to pass the blessings of God's grace.⁷ This idea of "sacramental efficacy," this supposition that a ritual, in itself, could bring spiritual results--where did it come from?

Surely not from the New Testament. When he wrote 1 Peter 3:21, the apostle seems to have been aware of the supposition that rituals, in themselves, supposedly confer divine blessings. The baptism that saves, he explains, is not the ritual in itself. What saves is not "the removal of dirt from the body"--the ritual, in itself. So where does the idea of sacramental efficacy come from?

Modern thinking about baptism as a sacrament comes from the historical intrusion of mystery from the mystery religions.⁸ These Mysteries flourished throughout the Roman Empire for a thousand years into the fourth and fifth centuries A.D.⁹

SACRAMENT AND MYSTERY

The mystery religions embodied the idea of "sacrament." The action taken was all important. Even though worshippers might be completely stoned as in the festival of Bacchus, the god of wine, or spaced out by drugs or in an emotional state of complete amnesia, unaware of their surroundings; fellowship with their gods was thought possible.¹⁰ The ritual, in itself, was thought to bring about spiritual blessings, regardless of personal, conscious participation by the candidate.

At the time of the early church the Mysteries were going strong, but the church resisted them.¹¹ An example of this is the burning of books of magic in Ephesus (Acts 19: 19). The Mysteries were an attempt to find a more emotional and ecstatic experience of religion.

Worshippers sought to attain some sort of mystical union with their gods. This (they hoped) would guarantee them immortality. The celebrations themselves were usually in some sort of dramatic presentation with recital of certain mystic formulae by a pagan priest.¹² The appeal to

the emotions rather than to the intellect, has caused one writer to observe that "the mystery religions were very close to partaking of magic."¹³

(Before we go further, do be aware that this information is found in numerous historical works.)

Around 399 A.D., the church experienced what has been called "sudden and extraordinary growth."¹⁴ The emperor Constantine had earlier issued an edict of toleration, which favored Christianity with the result that membership in the church became the thing to do. Pagans by the tens of thousands crowded forward to receive baptism. This influx of partially converted pagans influenced the beliefs and practices of the church. Adolph Harnack, noted church historian, wrote that after the death of Paul, "all the floodgates were opened and in poured the mysteries with their lore."¹⁵ The chief media of sacramentarianism to the West were the Mysteries.¹⁶ Joseph Belcastro, in his book, *The Relationship of Baptism to Church Membership*, states that it was only when the pagan baptismal ideas of the mystery religions were accepted by the church, that baptism became a controversial issue.¹⁷

The ancient Mysteries exercised enormous influence on the history of Europe. In fact, they changed the religious outlook of the entire Western world, being influential in the Church to this day.¹⁸

(Some Roman Catholic theologians acknowledge that their sacramental theology originates with the mystery religions but defend it as in harmony with scriptural teaching.¹⁹ Mind you, the average member of the church isn't told of its origins. He or she is told it's a sacrament, a term of awe and reverent regard.)

Neither in the New Testament nor in the early Church Fathers who came after the apostles, is the term mystery ever used concerning baptism.²⁰ The one who in the fifth century formally introduced the mystery emphasis into the church and who thus set the sacramental direction for baptism was St. Augustine.²¹ A revered theologian, Augustine was, nevertheless, a product of his times. Augustine influenced medieval Roman Catholic theologians as well as the early Protestant reformers.²² Both held that baptism--the ritual in itself--conferred God's grace regardless of personal response by the candidate.²³

Two main features of the mystery religions were magic and superstition.²⁴ These features show up in a chronological sketch concerning mystery in religion.

In the second century, some of the chief leaders of the church were drawn from the Greek thinking world. These men introduced into the church, terms and practices from the Mysteries, which had been their religious heritage.²⁵ It was from them that the term sacrament showed up in reference to baptism.²⁶

About the middle of the third century, an "unexpected and extraordinary emphasis" came into church: I speak of exorcism. To get demons out, exorcists would go through certain rituals.²⁷ Once baptism was looked upon as a ritual that in itself had saving value, it made sense to exorcise the presumed guilt of the wee one by performing the ritual. Baptism as exorcism was also applied to adults.

A glimpse into the Church Fathers, those writers who followed the days of the apostles down through about the 6th century, is revealing.

In the third century, Origen engaged in controversy with Celsus, an opponent of Christianity. In the controversy, he tells Celsus that Celsus had no right to deny the reality of magic. Origen, reputed to be the greatest biblical scholar among the Greek Fathers, believed in the reality of magic!²⁸

By the fourth century, the reality of magic was commonly held within the church.²⁹ Not only did many hold that magic was real, they also believed that there existed a higher form of magic that was divine.³⁰ During this period, the church possessed sacred objects which were believed to protect and to bless the worshipper.³¹

The Church Fathers, in general, were far from denying the power of magic.³²

The New Testament uses mystery, but it never has the magical connotation that clustered around "sacrament." As the apostle Paul uses it, mystery was something once hidden but now revealed. Nevertheless, in the last two decades of the fourth century, the growing association of magic with mystery affected the Latin Vulgate, Jerome's translation of the bible from the Greek.³³ In the Roman church, the Vulgate's unofficial use was widespread for more than a thousand years prior to the Council of Trent. In 1546, the Council declared it the "authoritative" version.³⁴

The original text of the Greek New Testament uses the word mystery (*mysterion*). Although in the Latin there was a word for mystery, Jerome sometimes used the Latin sacramentum.³⁵ Why did he substitute sacrament for mystery? Evidently because he considered them alike in mean-

ing. Originally sacrament simply connoted a pledge of obedience or something used for religious purposes. By Jerome's time, however, sacrament now referred to magic with its sacramental efficacy. This use of *sacramentum* in this popular and semi-official version--the Vulgate--no doubt had a great deal to do in determining sacramental thought in the Middle Ages and even down to this day.

Augustine, a contemporary of Jerome, lived in the latter part of the fourth and the early part of the fifth century. Because of his tremendous impact upon both Romanism and Protestantism, it is interesting to observe where he was at in terms of what some would call magic or superstition--happenings which Augustine himself, no doubt, would have referred to as miracles. F.D. Kershner, in his book *Pioneers of Christian Thought*, tells how Augustine was being pressed to demonstrate how those who were consigned to hell could burn forever--how could something which was physical burn endlessly? He called upon certain greater miracles that he presumed were actually happening in his own time. He was trying to prove that the physical could burn forever. He speaks of a fountain that was so cold in the daytime that no one could drink from it and so hot in the night that it couldn't be touched. Or he spoke of certain asbestos which once inflamed could never be quenched. Then he spoke of apples in the country of Sodom which were fair to the eye but when they were touched would fall to dust and ashes. He was quite sure that the mares of Cappadocia conceived with the wind; however, their foal only lived for about three years. Augustine was a product of his times.³⁶ Whether this was miracle or magic or superstition, I leave to you. Regardless, he is widely considered the theologian who over the centuries has most influenced the thinking of the church.

Belief in magic flourished extraordinarily, we're told, from the 6th to the 8th century. Even Pope Gregory the Great (590-604 A.D.) had furthered it with his example and sanctioned it with his authority. The clergy themselves supported magical practice and usage.³⁷

In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas illustrates how sacrament as ritual supposedly has effectiveness in itself. ("Thomism" is a very important term in Catholic theology--Thomas developed the theological framework for Roman Catholic theology.) Thomas attempted to relate things which were on the plane of human reason, to matters which had to do with divine revelation. Passage from the lower level was through sacrament, he argued, especially through baptism. As a sacrament,

baptism somehow mysteriously moves people from the realm of mere human understanding to that which comes from the realm of divine understanding.³⁸

Baptism had started out simply as a ritual used for religious purposes, especially as a pledge of commitment. With the concept of mystery added, baptism came to be regarded as a sacrament, a ritual efficacious (effective) in itself. (This defines sacrament as something more than a simple means of grace.) Personal faith in the candidate, though sometimes present, was no longer considered necessary to the ritual. By the sacramental concept, faith and baptism got pulled apart.

Whether baptism is a "sacrament" is discussed in chapter five.

The Middle Reformers' reaction against sacramentalism has kept faith and baptism apart, in relation to salvation. How this happened, follows.

Kept Apart by "Faith Alone"

When the Middle Reformers--Zwingli and Calvin--rejected sacramentalism, they adopted the concept of salvation by faith alone. A review of where the Protestant Reformers were at, on the topic of sacrament, helps us to understand salvation by faith alone, especially as it relates to baptism.

You will recall that, at the time of the Protestant Reformation, many believed that mankind was incapable of exercising faith, repentance or obedience. Mankind's will was to be freed by "regenerating grace."³⁹ For sacramentalists, we recall, the answer to humanity's spiritual depravity was the classic concept of sacrament. God's grace, they said, is conveyed by what is dubbed "supernaturally endowed instrumentalities." In theological writings, these instrumentalities or means are called "sacraments." Baptism was held to be the instrumental cause of regeneration.

The Middle Reformers, on the other hand, rejected the view that baptism was a sacrament that brought salvation. Instead, as we've observed, they held that salvation is by faith alone and faith, a direct, miraculous supernatural gift to the one being saved.⁴⁰ Whereas faith and baptism in relation to salvation got pulled apart by the sacramental idea, the faith alone concept has kept them apart. The rationale for "faith alone" is explained in what follows.

"INSTRUMENTALITIES" EXCLUDED

Among those of the Reformed tradition, "instrumentalities" or "means" are excluded--whether it be baptism or any other human action. If mankind can say "yes" to God without a miracle from God, then--it is said--salvation would be due to human effort and the basic decision wouldn't be God's but mankind's.⁴¹ God wouldn't be in charge, they say. God wouldn't be sovereign.⁴² Due to "sovereign grace," they say, regeneration or the New Birth occurs with faith as a supernatural gift.⁴³

Only if salvation be by faith alone and faith, a gift--allowing that repentance and obedience are part of the miracle of faith, would God be in charge. Only then, they claim, would His sovereignty be acknowledged.

Thus we have two reasons why it is thought that salvation must be by faith alone. One: mankind is thought incapable of responding to the grace of God without a miracle. Two: if faith is not considered a miracle, God's sovereignty is denied.

GOD'S "SOVEREIGNTY"

Though God be sovereign,⁴⁴ He doesn't always get His own way, as we look at it anyway: His will is that no one perish (Matthew 18:14). God is gracious; but do we have to have to hold the opinion that human beings cannot choose to believe, so that God may be considered sovereign? ⁴⁵ As Garland Bare says in an article on prayer, perhaps we need to refresh our understanding of God's grace.

The classic brief is that grace is "unmerited favor." Grace is God's loving, caring concern that every human being have what is best for him or her. Dr. Bare offers a different though not contradictory definition: grace is sovereignty surrendered. He then illustrates by stating that God who knows all, forgets mankind's sin. God who is all powerful, surrendered that power when he took upon Himself the weakness of the flesh in the Incarnation. The Word, who was God, became flesh. He also allowed humanity, whom He loves, the option of returning that love or of rejecting Him. He didn't make us puppets but surrendered His sovereignty to make us partners, Dr. Bare adds.

Does the fact that grace is sovereignty surrendered, that the offer of salvation is solely by God's choice, that His grace is freely offered, mean that there are no human conditions? No. There are human conditions for salvation. It seems that God's way is to allow human beings created in

His image with the capacity to think, feel, to decide for Him or against Him. In chapter three, we'll see that grace does not exclude human obedience, that obedience is our willingness to be persuaded, that obedience to the gospel is necessary to salvation and that obedience is an essential expression of the faith that justifies.

We human beings may honor God's sovereignty by accepting His grace as it has been offered and by responding on His terms.

"GOD DEALS DIRECTLY"

According to B.B. Warfield, the difference between those of the Reformed tradition and others, is that in saving human beings, God deals with individuals directly, not by means of "anything or anybody." He acts directly upon the soul, it is claimed. In this way, and only in this way, can human merit--a doctrine of "works"--be excluded in the matter of salvation, it is said.⁴⁶

Given this mentality, it seems that mankind is to do nothing even to receive or to accept salvation. Naturally, for such folk, baptism in relation to salvation--even as a response expressing one's faith or as faith-obedience--is out. Baptism would be considered irrelevant to salvation, or at worst, a work.

(I sometimes wonder if people of both viewpoints--those who advocate sacramentalism and those who reject it--when they think, speak or write of baptism aren't thinking primarily of its ritual aspect.)

Scripture, on the other hand, says that humanity is to do something to respond to God's grace. Whether what a person does as an expression of faith, is a work (chapter three) and whether baptism is a work (chapter five) remains to be seen.

It's clear that God does use human means: by means of baptism, we may accept God's plan for our lives; by means of baptism, we make disciples enrolling them in the School of Christ; by means of baptism, we commit ourselves to Christ as Lord and reject sin as Lord (chapter eight). By means of baptism, we may appeal to God for a good or forgiven conscience (chapter nine).

Ironically, the only time in scripture the topic of faith alone is mentioned in relation to salvation, it's denied: "You see," says James 2:24, "that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone."

Having rejected sacramentalism, the Middle Reformers saw no action needed for salvation, especially baptism. Although the ideas were

possibly not brand new, they formally and forcefully advanced that we are saved by faith alone, and that faith is a miraculous gift. Those who formally and forcefully advanced the idea that we are saved by faith alone, and that faith is a miraculous gift were these Middle Reformers in the early 1500's. It sometimes helps to know where our ideas come from.

Summing it Up

Faith and baptism, in relation to salvation, got pulled apart by the sacramental concept and have been kept apart by "faith alone." If these observations are correct, then we do well to examine faith, which is so important both to justification by faith and to the baptism that saves. "The faith that justifies," follows.⁴⁷

ENDNOTES

1. A summary of Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican and Protestant Reformed views concerning means by which grace is conferred may be found in "Grace," Encyclopedia Britannica (Chicago, 1966), X, 650.
2. J.C. Lambert, "Sacraments," ISBE, IV, 2636b.
3. Marshall, F.H., p. 213.
4. Georg [sic] E. Steitz, "Baptism," NSHE, I, 205b. See also J.R. Quinn, "Sacrament, Theology of, (Causality)," NCE, XII, 809, 810. According to Beasley-Murray, p. 264, the notion that a ritual could, in itself, bring God's favors to pass is the essence of "magic." In magic thought, a ritual per se is "laden" (loaded) with supernatural power. See also W. Dupre, "Magic," NCE, IX, 65, 66.
5. "Sacrament" means different things to different people. For a discussion of this issue, see note one, chapter five.
6. Canon Six in the Decree of the Council of Trent, quoted in "Sacrament," MSC, IX (1891), 215a. See also P.L. Hanley, "Ex Opere Operato," NCE, V, 700.
7. The ritual is, in itself, considered automatically efficacious so long as no "bar" obstructs or gets in the way. Such a bar or barrier could be insincerity, or a deliberate intention to continue sinning, etc. (Geoffrey W. Bromiley, "Baptismal Regeneration," BDTh, p. 89.) Steitz, I, 205a, credits Augustine with the idea of "passive receptivity," a concept at the root of the *ex opere operato* doctrine of sacramentalism.
8. Dean Inge in his Christian Mysticism, p. 354, says that Catholicism owes to the Mysteries the concept of "sacramental" grace. Quoted in Angus, p. vii.
9. Ibid.
10. Angus, pp. 59, 101
11. Marshall, F.H., pp. 283, 293.
12. Angus, pp. 50ff., 100ff.
13. Rufus M. Jones, "Mysticism," HERE, IX, 81.
14. Marshall, F.H., pp. 214.

15. A. Harnack, *Expansion of Christianity*, (London: Williams and Norgate, 1904), Vol. I, p. 134, quoted by Joseph Belcastro, p. 158.
16. Angus, p. viii. Roman Catholic scholar, Hugo Rahner, confirms this. See Hugo Rahner, "The Christian Mystery and the Pagan Mysteries" in Joseph Campbell (ed.), *Pagan and Christian Mysteries* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1955), p. 146.
17. Belcastro, p. 158.
18. Angus, pp. vii, 44.
19. Rahner, pp. 196ff., argues that baptism is the fundamental mystery of Christianity but acknowledges that, over the first four centuries, the church surrounded the rite with terminology and ritual drawn from the mysteries. Both the mystery of baptism and the mysteries have a "common substratum," he claims. See also T.M. Ferrari, "Baptism (Theology of)," NCE, II, 62b. Roman Catholic authorities, nevertheless, insist that baptism as a sacrament is "not the same as magic." Quinn, pp. 813b.
20. "Sacrament," MSC, IX, 212b. See also Berkouwer, p. 27.
21. "Baptism," *Cyclopedia Britannica*, 9th ed., quoted in MSC, Vol. I Supplement, 330b.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 330b, 331a.
23. Steitz, I, 205a.
24. Angus pp. 51, 59, 245.
25. Mosheim, I, 133, 134.
26. Fr. William J. Bausch speaks of the possibility of magical overtones of automatic justification in contemporary pagan cults. Bausch, p. 66. See also Beasley-Murray, p. 354, where he quotes an H.J. Evander.
27. Mosheim, pp. 189, 190, 190 n. 13.
28. Kirby Flower Smith, "Magic (Greek and Roman)," *HERE*, VIII, 277b.
29. E. Von Dobschutz, "Charms and Amulets (Christian)," *HERE*, III, 414a.
30. *Ibid.* See also Marshall, F.H., p. 272.
31. Von Dobschutz, p. 414a.
32. Smith, p. 277. See also Marshall, F.H., p. 213.
33. Andrew F. Walls, "Mystery, Mysteries," *BDTh*, p. 367.
34. L.F. Hartman, "Vulgate," NCE, XIV, 759a.
35. Lambert, p. 2636b. See also A. Plummer, "Sacraments," *HDB*, IV, 327b, 328a.
36. Kershner, pp. 180, 181.
37. Von Dobschutz, p. 414a.
38. Kershner, pp. 224, 225.
39. James I. Packer, "Freedom, Free Will," *BDTh*, p. 230.
40. Georg [sic] Steitz, "Baptism," *NSHE*, I (1908), 206a.
In his chapter on "Baptism According to the Reformed Tradition," Cottrell shows how Zwingli developed what has become known as "Reformed Theology," and how Calvin took it up and gave it formal structure.
41. Packer, p. 230.
42. Cottrell, pp. 44, 63, 64.
43. In a concise article, "Calvinism," Cornelius Van Til summarizes the concepts of mankind's presumed inability to respond, of faith as a miraculous gift, and of so-called "sovereign grace." (*BDTh*, p.109.)

44. In Hebrew *Elohim* for "God," the root *El* means "power." The plural suffix *-im* for grandeur tells of the greatness of God's power. In theological terms, God is in control. It is He who set the conditions of both the covenant of works (the Law) and the covenant of grace (justification by faith; see chapter six concerning Baptism and Covenant, including notes 25 through 28). In either covenant, human beings have been given the option of deciding whether to acknowledge His sovereign will. Even though He may make many concessions (it's called "grace") toward mankind--His in-His-image creation, God has the last word.
45. The issue is not whether God is sovereign. The viewpoint under question is whether His sovereignty is expressed in a theory called "sovereign grace."
The theory of "sovereign grace," in essence, is that, because of mankind's depraved will (unable to believe, repent, obey), God by his "regenerating grace" (by the Holy Spirit), infuses faith as a miracle. God thus displays his sovereignty (power). By this theory, men of faith have sought to honor God.
Such a theory would be meaningless, however, if mankind could choose to believe. To argue God's sovereignty, allegedly demonstrated by "sovereign grace," one must hold to man's inability to believe. For this reason, we have defined "sovereign grace" as: a concept that argues that man cannot choose to believe, so that God may be "sovereign."
God, of course, is sovereign. See note 44.
46. Warfield, pp. 18-20.
47. Mark 5: 36, "only believe," and Luke 8: 50, "only believe," have sometimes been quoted or cited out of context but have no relationship to faith and salvation.

Chapter Three

THE FAITH THAT JUSTIFIES

A younger Christian brother, a bit pugnacious in his approach, wanted to "discuss" baptism with me. I told him I would if, first, he would do a study of faith. You see, what we think about faith, makes a huge difference what we think about baptism.

Historic theological systems all understand that faith somehow accompanies baptism. As already observed, some consider faith a miraculous gift of God. Paedobaptists (baptizers of infants) posit faith in the parents, godparents or the Church. Some have even claimed that infants believe. For some, faith is infused in infants at baptism, baptism being considered a sacrament. (We'll discuss baptism of infants in chapters six and seven.)

So what about the faith that justifies? Is it any more than believing reliable testimony about Jesus? Is it to "trust Christ"? Is it merely to trust Christ? Would you include anything else in saving faith? Is it possible by proxy (by one who acts for another)--parents, godparents, the church? Is faith necessarily personal?

If we think that faith is a gift miraculously bestowed by the Holy Spirit on whomever He wills, and if we think that we are saved by faith alone, then we will probably consider that no action is needed for salvation, especially baptism. So does scripture teach that faith is the gift of God?

We'll start with the object of faith, then go to questions as to its nature, source and outcome.¹

The Object of Faith

The object of our faith is the power of God and God's son, Jesus the Christ. Two baptism passages remind us of this. In Colossians 2:12, the object of faith is clearly "the power of God who raised Jesus from the dead." For a person being baptized, the object of faith is the power of God! In 1 Peter 3: 21, 22, a strong baptism passage, the power and the object of our faith is not baptism but rather Jesus Christ raised from the dead and now exalted in the heavenly realm. Water baptism saves you, we read, "by the resurrection [there's the power] of Jesus Christ [there's the object of our faith], who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand--with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him." The object of our faith is Jesus Christ raised from the dead and now exalted in the heavenly realm.

The object of faith is not my self, "my church," the Church (hierarchy), trusted church leaders, the fact of my obedience, nor my understanding of baptism's purpose--none of these. The object of faith is God--the power of God, that is--who raised Jesus Christ from the dead, and Jesus Christ raised from the dead and now exalted in the heavenly realm. What, then, is this faith?

The Nature of Faith

TRUST

"Trust Christ" is a common, yet valid appeal. Many consider it the only response necessary. But does this adequately define faith?

First, let's acknowledge and insist that faith is personal trust. Abraham's faith is cited as illustrating this kind of faith. He "believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Romans. 4:3. The construction here, in the original tongue, may be translated, "Abraham 'trusted' God." Luther correctly defined faith as "trust."²

In the New Testament, such faith is always personal, never by proxy.³ The sentiment that someone can believe on behalf of another, is a later theological myth. Trusting faith is always personal.

FAITH IS ACTION

On the other hand, to passively "trust Christ" is less than adequate. By definition faith acts. The very suffix *-sis* of *pist/s/sis*, the Greek noun for faith, indicates this. Faith is an action word. Probably the best-known treatment of this action-aspect is James 2:14-26 (faith without deeds is dead). Christians are being admonished to demonstrate the reality of the faith which they claim, by deeds of Christian charity. The prime example of this action-kind of faith is Abraham. By the way, James is not distinguishing the faith that justified Abraham from the faith of Christians already justified, as some claim. In fact, he illustrates the action-faith by which Christians are to live, by the faith that justified Abraham! Faith is faith, and, as such, always acts!⁴ (It would be a mistake, of course, to assume that James' statement about the action-faith that justifies is a direct statement about baptism. Rather, James is simply telling us of faith, baptism's number one ingredient.)

Faith, baptism's number one ingredient, is active. It's never merely passive. This call for action, implicit in the very nature of faith, has troubled many. For them, anything done by sinful man, including baptism, is a "work"--an attempt to achieve salvation by virtue of one's

deeds. This is why the topic of faith and works is so important as we seek to put baptism in its appropriate place.

Another favorite admonition is to "receive Christ." Appropriately, John 1:12 is cited: ". . . as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on his name." (ASV) We do receive Christ by believing on his name. Translations, however, that speak of believing "on" Jesus' name (KJV, ASV and others) or believing "in" his name (NIV) miss a dynamic aspect of faith. Careful analysis of this verse suggests that by believing in/on his name, action is being taken toward Jesus: (a) "Believe" is a verb of motion and (b) Greek *eis*, here translated "in"/"on" is used with verbs of motion. Literally, "believe into/unto his name. Believing in/on Jesus is action taken toward Jesus!

Faith is active response to God's grace. That's why many see baptism as an active expression of their personal faith in Jesus as savior. (We'll have more about baptism as an expression of faith when we get to Galatians 3: 26, 27.)

One final word. For some, ritual (deed) is all important--do the sacrament and God's gifts are automatic, sometimes regardless of personal faith. For others, ritual is shoved aside as unimportant; ritual is even thought contrary to spirituality. G.R. Beasley-Murray shows that Judaism--we remember that Christianity is rooted in Judaism--did not make distinctions between the "outward and visible" (ritual, that is, such as baptism in the New Testament) and the "inward and spiritual" (such as faith). No distinction was drawn.⁵

In sum, faith's nature includes trust. It's always personal and includes action.

Faith is baptism's number one ingredient. So how does faith originate in the human heart? What are some consequences of faith? How do faith and works relate? Would anything we might do concerning our salvation be a "work"? What is a "work"? How folk of faith answer these questions determines how they understand what baptism is and its purposes.

Faith—Where Does it Come From?

Faith comes from hearing the Gospel (Romans 10:17). Such a straightforward declaration is simple enough.⁶ Nevertheless, over time the

origin of faith has been mystified beyond recognition. I direct your attention to the source of faith with several observations:

1. That faith derives from reliable testimony is most important. Otherwise, Christian faith may be, as certain cynics have argued, "believing things that aren't so." Be that as it may, it's possible to accept a proposition as true--God exists or Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God--and yet not have a faith that justifies. After all, demons of hell "believe". . . and shudder (James 2:19).

2. The message about Christ brings faith. Romans 10: 17: ". . . faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." John 20: 31; 1 Peter 1:23; John 12: 32; Acts 4: 4; Acts 8: 12 and Romans 1: 16, 17 say the same thing: The message about Christ brings faith.

3. There is, nevertheless, considerable theological nervousness concerning the source of faith. For example, I recently read the following in a well-circulated evangelical journal. The fact was set forth that we are acquitted, justified, not on the ground of our own "works and deservings" but on the ground of the "merits of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Next it was indicated that it is "by faith" that we are justified. (Agreed!) Then this word of caution: "Not that faith has any moral virtue; it is the gift of God."

Of course faith has no moral virtue--if by this you mean that because of our faith we deserve salvation, but is it the gift of God? Does scripture say so?

None of the passages usually cited clearly demonstrate that faith is a gift: Ephesians 2: 8, 9; John 6: 28, 29; Acts 18: 27; John 3: 3-5 and Matthew 16: 17.

EPHESIANS 2: 8,9

3a. Ephesians 2:8 is commonly cited: ". . . by grace you have been saved, through faith; and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God." What is this "this" that is the gift of God? Is it faith? By ignoring punctuation in various translations, faith might seem to be the gift of God. "This" (or "that" in some versions) might seem to refer back to faith: we're "saved. . . by faith and this [faith, supposedly]. . . is the gift of God." By setting aside technical English punctuation, it sounds to many like Ephesians 2:8 is saying that faith is the gift of God.

But Greek grammar will not allow this. In his Word Pictures in the New Testament, Volume IV, page 525, A.T. Robertson explains, and tells us that this (that), which is the gift of God, is the whole business of being saved by grace through faith, not faith itself.⁷ In other words, the gift of God is salvation-by-grace-through-faith. Hesitantly but helpfully The Living Bible confirms this in a footnote by saying: "Salvation is not of yourselves, [it is the gift of God]." The Living Oracles translation of 1870 by George Campbell, James Macknight and Philip Dodridge brings out the basic idea: "For by favor are you saved through faith; and this salvation not by yourselves, it is the gift of God. . . ." (See also J.B. Phillips, the Williams translation [Moody] and the Jerusalem Bible.)

Ephesians 2: 8, 9 does not teach that faith is the gift of God.

JOHN 6:28,29

3b. To some, John 6:28, 29 speaks of faith as a miraculous gift. In older translations, we read, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent [Jesus]." Thus faith is thought to be the "work of God." A better translation might help: This is the work that God would have you do--believe on him whom he hath sent. See also the New International Version (in the earlier editions, anyway) where verse 28 speaks of (you) doing the work God requires: believe in the one whom God has sent. The Williams translation agrees.

ACTS 18:27

3c. In Acts 18: 27, most translations speak of those who by grace, believed. The Jerusalem Bible, on the other hand, tell us that Apollos was enabled by God's grace to help the believers. So was it that the believers in Greece had by grace, believed? Or was it that Apollos was enabled, by grace, to help? That is, does "by grace" modify believing or helping? Two leading commentators--A.T. Robertson and I. Howard Marshall--explain that Greek grammar would allow "by grace" to modify either believing or helping.⁸ Acts 18: 27 does not necessarily demonstrate that faith is by divine grace, miraculously imparted.

JOHN 3: 3-5

3d. The prime base for the idea that faith is miraculously bestowed by the Holy Spirit is John 3: 3-5. True, the concept that faith is a miracle by the Holy Spirit, may be read into this context and fit. I think I know why. In verse eight, Jesus gives an illustration about the mysterious operation of the wind: "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear

its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going." This mysterious operation of the wind has been taken to illustrate how the Holy Spirit mysteriously operates to infuse faith in the unbeliever.

Jesus' own application, however, is not how the Spirit mysteriously operates: "So it is with everyone [every person] born of the Spirit." The mystery is the person now changed--born again.⁹ The exact role of the Spirit in the New Birth, is not specified. (See chapter ten concerning the place of the Spirit in bringing us into the Body of Christ.) The idea that faith is a miracle by the Holy Spirit has been read into the text, not derived from it.

Even the statement in Acts 16: 14 that the Lord opened Lydia's heart to believe (to give heed) doesn't indicate how this was done--was it by direct intervention of the Spirit or, as Romans 10:17 suggests, simply by hearing the message?¹⁰

The idea that faith is a miraculous gift arose from the assumption that mankind is so sinful, so utterly depraved, that he could not so much as "lift a hand" in response to the Gospel.¹¹ This notion of depravity and inability to respond comes from Augustine, near the end of the fourth century.¹² And so it was concluded that God, in His grace, bestows faith as a miraculous gift.

When the apostle Paul speaks of our being spiritually dead, he refers, not to some sort of inability to respond but to being condemned because of our transgressions and sins (Ephesians 2:1; by contrast, to be made alive is to be forgiven, Colossians 2:13).

MATTHEW 16:17

Matthew 16:17 has been cited to demonstrate that the Spirit, by direct revelation, had made a believer out of Peter. But how the Heavenly Father revealed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God is not explained, is it? Some suggest that Peter drew this conclusion because God, for about two years, had been revealing this truth indirectly by the words and deeds of Jesus (cf. John 20: 30,31).

The gospel has within it dynamic power to draw people (Romans 1:16). People are invited to respond in faith. Those who do, have appreciated the Gospel's ring of truth. They respond in personal trust, expressed in action. Some of my friends feel comfortable to express the situation like the early Anabaptists did: "Faith is a gift of God that comes through hearing the Word."¹³ The view, however, that faith is a miracle, directly

bestowed by the Holy Spirit, doesn't have roots in Scripture. Faith comes from hearing the message about Christ.

The outcome of such faith is our next consideration. What we think about this aspect of faith, really affects how we think about baptism.

Faith—What Follows it?

BLESSINGS

God blesses those who live by faith in His Son, Jesus the Christ. Time would fail us, were we to attempt a complete list of the blessings of faith. Nevertheless, a few key reminders are in order: forgiveness of sins, i.e. salvation, justification (Acts 10:43; Ephesians 2:8; Romans 1:16, 17); union with Christ in his death (II Corinthian 5:7, 14, 15); union with Christ in his resurrection (Colossians 2:12); sonship (Galatians 3:26); membership in the Body (Ephesians 2:8-22); the Spirit (Galatians 3:2, 14); grace to live according to the will of God (Romans 3:31); and resurrection (hope) (John 11:25-27). British Baptist scholar, G.R. Beasley-Murray indicates that these same blessings are also promised those who have been baptized.¹⁴

FAITHFULNESS

Faithfulness follows faith. Galatians 5:22 highlights the vital connection. In most versions since the KJV, the Greek *pistis*, usually translated faith, is here translated faithfulness, and is one of the fruits (outcomes) of the Spirit in the lives of Christians. The passage is a promise to those who are already justified, already sons of God. It does not demonstrate--as some have claimed--that faith is a Holy Spirit miracle to bring faith to the unbeliever.

OBEDIENCE

Because of the nature of faith as personal and active, it should come as no surprise that the apostle Paul in his great epistle on justification by faith (Romans) twice reveals that his goal is to bring mankind to obedience, the "obedience of faith" (Romans 1:5; 16:26 ASV). Verse 5 (NIV) speaks of the "obedience that comes from faith." The outcome of faith in deity is always obedience: "Faith is obedience," says theologian Emil Brunner, "literally nothing else at all." Faith issues in obedience. Sometimes we sing, "The vilest offender who truly believes, that moment from Jesus a pardon receives." If faith is obedience, is this true? It depends on what you mean by truly believing, doesn't it?

Faith is obedience, we are justified by faith--but is obedience required for salvation? To do so, some urge, would be to make obedience a work and set aside God's grace. We must quickly explore these themes--faith and works, obedience and grace, obedience and salvation. Then we can discuss Galatians 3:26, 27--the relationship between faith and baptism.

Faith and Works

"WORKS"

The faith that justifies is never merely passive. By definition, teaching and example, biblical faith is always active. As I've suggested, this call for action, implicit in the very nature of faith, has troubled many. For them there is deep concern that anything done by sinful humanity toward their salvation, including baptism, is a "work"--an attempt to achieve salvation by virtue of one's deeds. So what are "works"? What is the relationship between faith and works?

"Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling"--a wonderful thought. Truly, there is nothing we can be or do that will achieve or merit salvation. Certain scriptures bring this out: Ephesians 2:8, 9; Titus 3:5; and Romans 4:1-8.

Salvation, the apostle writes, is "not of yourselves. . . not of works." (Ephesians 2:8, 9) It does not depend on anything we have achieved. It is not a reward for the good we have done.

To Titus he says that salvation is "not by works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves" (Titus 3:5). J.B. Phillips translation expresses it: salvation is "not by virtue of any moral achievement of ours." Living New Testament paraphrases: salvation is "not because we were good enough to be saved."

The Romans 4:1-8 passage also rejects any place for works in our justification (salvation). Let's understand, though, what Paul has in mind when he speaks of works. Citing Abraham as a supposed example, the context indicates that a person might be seeking justification by virtue of what he does (his works, verses 1, 2). God would thereby be placed in the seeker's debt (verse 4). The seeker would be able to boast of deserving God's favor as a reward (verse 2). Such a path to justification was not for Abraham, nor is it for us.

So, what is a "doctrine of works"? What does it mean? A doctrine of works would be to presume that by our virtuous self-achievement we are, or could be, worthy of divine reward. This concern that by our deeds we

may be attempting to be thought worthy of salvation, that God somehow owes us, is understandable! Clearly, such a doctrine is to be rejected, despite any wistful desire that it be so.

Romans four, verse five (ASV) reads: "Now to him that worketh not. . . his faith is reckoned for righteousness." This has been construed to mean that justification is by faith alone; i.e., to him that does nothing ("does not work"), his faith is reckoned for righteousness. Anyone who practices or urges deeds--deeds of any sort--in relation to salvation would forfeit justification, they say. Does the apostle mean, then, that the only faith that is acceptable is purely passive? Certainly not. We recall what we have learned about faith's active nature--by definition. In fact, faith itself is something we do; it's a work or deed that God requires (John 6: 28, 29).

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND WORKS

Our deeds don't have merit, but according to James our faith is nothing if it isn't active--it's "dead" (2:17, 26); it's "barren," [ASV] or "useless" (2:20). What we do is very important: it reveals what we really believe (2:18). Our deeds complete our faith (2:22).

Some have thought that Paul was saying that we're not saved by works, and that James was saying that we are. (See the passages in Romans, Ephesians and Titus cited above. See also James 2:14-26.) Both writers employed the same Greek word--the word *erga*, it's true. In both writings, earlier versions translated *erga* as works. Different contexts, though, determine the distinctive meanings which each writer intended. Many later translations, by using such terms as "deeds" or "actions" in James, have cleared up the seeming contradiction. This has allowed each set of passages--those of Paul and that of James--to set forth its own message. The New International Version is a good example. In relation to salvation, Paul rejects deeds of prideful self-sufficiency and James approves deeds of faith.

The same deeds (*erga*) may be done for very different, even opposing, motives. A person may give ten thousand dollars as an expression of faith. Another, as an attempt to appear righteous. Quite often, the deed is not the entire point, but the motive is everything. A person may be baptized as an expression of loving, obedient faith in Jesus Christ. Another, because he somehow thinks that, once baptized, God owes him a place in heaven.

The impression that anything we might do in response to God's grace, is a work, is untrue. An expression of faith--baptism or anything else--is not a work. The faith that justifies is always action-oriented. In fact, when our deeds are expressions of faith, we're said to be justified by what we do (James 2:21-24).

So What About This Faith That Justifies?

The object of the faith that justifies is the power of God who raised Jesus from the dead and God's Son, Jesus Christ, raised from the dead and now exalted in the heavenly realm. Faith is trust, personal trust. Faith in Jesus is active. It comes from hearing the gospel; none of the passages usually cited clearly demonstrate that faith is a miraculous gift. Blessings, including forgiveness of sins--salvation, justification--and the Spirit, follow. Faithfulness also follows faith and faith in deity always issues in obedience. Deeds that are expressions of faith--baptism or anything else--are not "works."

Lingering Questions

Meanwhile, we still have some questions about obedience and grace, obedience and salvation: Is obedience required for salvation? Would urging obedience for salvation, make obedience a work and set aside God's grace? (Salvation is unmerited; is it without conditions?) What is obedience? Is it any more than doing what we're told? What is grace? Once we've probed these issues, we'll see how baptism, according to scripture, explains the faith that justifies.

Faith, Obedience, and Grace

FAITH AND OBEDIENCE

We're justified by faith, faith is obedience--but is obedience required for salvation?

First, what is obedience? It's doing what we're told but more than that, it's an attitude. Obedience, at core, is willingness to be persuaded.

I think most of us are acquainted with John 3:16. John 3:36 says almost the same thing--"He that believes on the Son has eternal life"--but adds that "he that obeys not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." This is the American Standard Version. The King James Version says, "...he that believes not the Son shall not see life..." So which is it--he that believes not or he that disobeys? The problem is that the original term, *apeitheo*, literally means "to refuse to be persuaded."¹⁵

Now is refusing to be persuaded disbelief or is it disobedience? It's both,

isn't it? It shows how essential obedience is to one's faith. (NIV reads "reject.")

Obedience, by contrast, is allowing one's self to be persuaded, then following through with appropriate action. To refuse to be persuaded, to deliberately disbelieve--to disobey--is to not see life. To allow one's self to be persuaded--to believe, to obey--is to see life.

OBEDIENCE, NECESSARY?

Another scripture is Hebrews 3:18-4:1, addressed to Hebrew Christians in peril of losing their salvation by neglect (2:1-3). Because of their disobedience (verse 18), because of their unbelief (verse 19), their forefathers had not entered the promised land (God's "rest"). Then comes the warning that these Hebrew Christians might come short if they imitate this disobedient unbelief (4:1).

What we have here is a Hebrew parallelism--verse 19 repeats the thought of verse 18. Verse 18: they disobeyed; verse 19: their unbelief. Disobedience is unbelief! And disobedient unbelief means missing out on our salvation (falling short of the "rest" that lies ahead, 4:1-11). Once again, we see the vital connection between faith, obedience and salvation. In fact, scripture clearly indicates, it seems to me, that obedience to the gospel is necessary to salvation: 2 Thessalonians 1:8; Hebrews 5:9; 1 Peter 4:17; Acts 5:32.¹⁶

2 Thessalonians 1:8: "He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus."

Hebrews 5:9: ". . . he [Jesus] became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him."

1 Peter 4:17: "For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?"

Acts 5:32: ". . . the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

GRACE AND OBEDIENCE

We're saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8,9). Grace, as we've noticed, is God's loving, caring concern that every human being have what is best for him or her. God saves us, not because we are good but because He is good. He has loved us unconditionally--even when we

were sinners and enemies of God (Romans 1).¹⁷ Grace appeared when Jesus came bringing salvation (John 1. Titus 2:11ff.).

Our salvation is unmerited, but it's not without its conditions. It's not unconditional. It's grace--"God so loved the world," conditioned on faith and faith is obedience: it's obedience-faith. (See above re. John 3:16, 36.) Grace does not remove the necessity of obedience that comes from faith.

God has shown grace throughout history. He was gracious to Abraham, for example: Abraham's faith was credited as righteousness (Genesis 15:6). To hear some tell of it, one might think that the relationship was without conditions.¹⁸ In fact, some cite Abraham's situation as an example of justification by faith alone. No conditions, no obedience required for Abraham. Therefore, it is reasoned, God in His grace accepts us by "faith alone." No conditions, no obedience required for salvation. If you read only Genesis 15:6, where we're informed that Abraham believed God and that the Lord God credited him as righteous, and if you misconstrue what Paul is saying in Romans 4 as "do nothing, only believe"; you might conclude that there were no conditions, that God's blessings were not conditioned upon Abraham's obedience. Since Genesis says no more concerning Abraham's faith, suppose we turn to the New Testament, to see how Genesis 15:6 is applied to us.

Abraham's faith, by which he was declared righteous (James 2:21-23), did not stand alone, apart from obedience. By faith, Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice (Hebrews 1); by this deed, his faith was made complete (James 2:21,22). And what had he done by which his faith was made complete? He had obeyed God (Genesis 22:18). The faith by which Abraham was justified was not without obedience. It wasn't "faith plus nothing."

The entire Galatian epistle is devoted to the process of justification by faith and shows the place of both obedience and grace. Abraham is cited as the example of justification by faith (3:6-9). (For further comments concerning Abraham's faith and its relevance to us, see notes 23-26, chapter six.) A "Galatians scenario" goes like this: (a) By God's grace, Christ had died for our righteousness (2:21). (b) By the grace of Christ, the gospel had been preached (1:6-9). (c) The gospel is the truth (2:5, 14). (d) This gospel truth had been responded to by faith, not works (2:16,19). (e) By faith, they had been justified--credited as righteous (3:6-9). (f) By faith, they had received the Holy Spirit (3:1-5). (g) Concern

arose that they were now abandoning faith in Jesus Christ--faith in him alone--and were now trusting their own human effort (the "works" of the "flesh") to reach the goal (3:3). (h) This concern that they were abandoning their justification by faith was expressed in the fact that they were no longer obeying the truth (5:7).¹⁹ Let's say that again: This concern that they were abandoning their justification by faith was expressed in the fact that they were no longer obeying the truth. The faith that justified, included obedience!

Obedience by the Galatians was not an add-on. It wasn't faith and obedience: Obedience was an essential expression of the faith that justified. The faith that justifies, obeys; the faith that obeys, justifies.

God's offer of salvation is solely by His choice, His grace is freely offered. Theologians sometimes refer to "free grace." Concentrating on the "free" aspect of the cliché, some have concluded that humanity is to do nothing in reference to salvation. It's true that grace is "free" in the sense that it contains "kindness which bestows upon one what he has not deserved (Thayer, 666a)." Nevertheless, the view that "free" means "nothing required of the recipient" goes beyond lexical definitions.

Grace does not exclude human obedience.

I'm concerned about those who understand and yet refuse to be persuaded. Or, understanding, refuse to act accordingly. Obedience as willingness to be persuaded, assumes that we understand what God's will is. It leaves no haven for the out-and-out rebel.

A stock expression I used to hear during the invitation still bothers me. "Be baptized. Complete your obedience," they'd say. Baptism doesn't complete our obedience. Biblically speaking, our baptism is simply the beginning of our obedience to Christ.

(Notice, by the way, that in Galatians, works and obedience are treated separately--works are condemned, by implication, obedience is urged--in fact, the lack of obedience is deplored; thus obedience--allowing one's self to be persuaded and doing what we're told--is not a work. It seems to me that the difference between salvation by works and salvation by obedience is this: a doctrine of salvation by works requires perfect compliance with every requirement (3:10), whereas obedience calls for a proper attitude and doing the best we can under the circumstances. You're free to disagree, of course.)

A further note to this Galatians scenario: Chapter three, verses 26 and 27, tell us that baptism explains or demonstrates the faith that justifies. We've come to appreciate faith, but--other than a ritual--what is baptism? Next, then, we'll take a closer look at baptism and see how this explanation works.

ENDNOTES

1. To fully define any subject, all three aspects--its nature, origin (source) and worth (outcome)--must be pursued.
2. Bridge and Phypers, p. 109.
3. In the Roman Catholic system, Thomas Aquinas picked up on Augustine's idea that infants believe through the faith of the Church. See Georg [sic] E. Steitz, "Baptism," NSHE (1882), I, 205b.
4. That saving faith always acts is contrasted with the "faith" of demons who refuse to act (James 2:18,19). This action-aspect of faith is also illustrated in Luke 5:20: Jesus saw their faith.
5. Beasley-Murray, pp. 7, 8.
6. Equally simple and straight forward is Philippians 1:29. Addressed to Christians, the statement is that it is their "privilege" to believe (as well as to suffer for Christ). The notion of privilege comes from grace, the stem of the verb *charizomai*. See Bauer, p. 876b. Philippians 1:29 is not a comment concerning the origin of faith.
7. In Greek, "faith" is feminine gender. "This [that]," which is the gift of God, is neuter gender. Thus "This [that]" does not agree grammatically and therefore does not refer specifically to faith.
8. Robertson, III, 309 and Marshall, p. 304.
9. Acknowledging that God works in a "realm of spirit," R.V.G. Tasker points out that there is something unpredictable (mysterious) about the behavior of the person who experiences the new birth of the Spirit. (Tasker, p. 67.)
10. John 6: 44, 45, is no more revealing. Jesus' statement in John 6: 4 that no one comes to him unless the Father who sent him draws him doesn't indicate how this would be done. Most likely, as Everett F. Harrison says, the drawing comes through teaching rather than through some mystical process (p. 1087).
In verse 45, Jesus quotes Isaiah 54:13 which predicts that the Lord's people will be taught by God. Rather than indicating how this would be done, it simply and literally means that they will be disciples of the Lord, becoming "initiated in the true knowledge of God, and obedient to His will." (J. Skinner, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah of the Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, ed. A.J. Kirkpatrick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1909), p. 139.)
11. Cornelius Van Til, "Calvinism," BDTh, p. 109.
12. O.J.-B. Du Roy, "Augustine, St." NCE, I, 1055b. If we reject the medieval notion of human "depravity," we do well to remember, nevertheless, that all of us are sinners (Romans 3: 10ff), that we are morally and spiritually weak (Romans 7:7ff.) and that Christ died for our pardon Romans 5:6-11). Pelagius should not become our patron saint.

13. Richard Muller, "Anabaptist and Believer's Baptism," *Ministry*, LIX, (November, 1986), p. 8.
14. Beasley-Murray, pp. 272, 273.
15. Thayer, p. 55.
16. The scriptures cited portray different aspects of obedience. "Obey" in 1 Peter 4:17 (*apeitheo*) and Acts 5:32 (*peitharcheo*), due to the common root *peith-*, carries the idea of persuasion. "The obedience suggested is not by submission to authority, but resulting from persuasion." On the other hand, "obey" (*hupakouo*) in 2 Thessalonians 1:8 speaks of submission to one who governs, as in submission by a servant to a master. See Vine, "Obedience, Obedient, Obey," III, 123-125.
17. For an excellent treatment of "grace," see T.H.L. Parker, "Grace," *BDTh*, pp. 257, 258.
18. See Daniel P. Fuller, "Abraham," *BDTh*, p. 18. Fuller also deals with "conditionality" in *Gospel and Law: Contrast or Continuum?* in which he deals with the hermeneutics of Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology. (pp. 134ff., esp. p. 142, "A possible solution. . .")
James 2: 17-24, which flatly denies salvation by faith alone, cites Abraham as an example of faith in its fullness--faith plus deeds essential to complete it.
19. The Greek verb used for obeying is *peitho*. See note 16.

THE BAPTISM THAT DEMONSTRATES THE FAITH THAT JUSTIFIES

How tragic it is that some people will quote Galatians 3:26, "you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" and stop. Equally tragic, it seems to me, is the way some who feel strongly that baptism has something to do with it, counter: "for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (verse 27)! You'd think these two verses were two sides of an argument. They're not. Together they make up a single statement. Before we finish the chapter, I hope to show how baptism (verse 27) demonstrates faith (verse 26).

Galatians 3:26,27 form a single statement: "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." (In the context of Galatians, these sons of God are persons who have been justified by faith.)

According to these verses, baptism somehow expresses the faith that justifies. The situation is this: Verse 27 begins with "for" (Greek *gar*) and Greek *gar* introduces an explanation for a preceding statement. Such an explanation may simply unfold the statement's meaning. It may also demonstrate its truth.¹ Thus verse 27--baptism into Christ and putting on Christ, explains verse 26--sons of God through faith.

In what ways, then, does verse 27 affirm verse 26? Verse 27 says that those baptized into Christ and now clothed with Christ are those who, according to verse 26, are sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. I understand him to be saying, "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. Let me explain: all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."² So how does being clothed with Christ explain sonship? And how does being baptized into Christ explain faith? The grammar here says there is a connection, so what is it?

How do being clothed with Christ and sonship relate? The usual explanation is that to be clothed with Christ--to wear him as a garment--means to assume his nature, to resemble him. Scripture frequently uses this expression for the lifestyle of the new person in Christ (Colossians 3:10-14 and Romans 13:14, for example). This Christ-likeness (verse 27) explains what it means to be a son of God (verse 26).

But how does faith in Christ Jesus and baptism into Christ relate? How could a mere ritual explain the faith that justifies? What is this baptism?

Other Than a Ritual, What is Baptism?

BAPTISM, A "RESULT"

We actually have two words in the New Testament for baptism. *Baptismos*, found in only three passages, is merely a reference to the action (Mark 7:4; Hebrews 9:10; Hebrews 6:2).³ *Baptisma* (bahp tisma), found everywhere else, is far more than the action of the ritual.⁴ The *-ma* suffix says that it's a "result" noun.⁵ In New Testament Greek, all words with *-ma* endings are "results." An often cited example is *gramma*, from the verb *grapho*, I write. The noun, *gramma* expresses the result of writing--a letter. A result noun expresses the total result of the action.

What, then, is baptism's "total result"? Once an individual has undergone the ritual, what should have taken place? (One typical response is to run to Acts 2:38--remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Don't worry, we'll get there.) The prior question is, what determines this total result? Only then can we appreciate what baptism is, other than a ritual.

So what determines baptism's total result? Its context! Context modifies the meaning of any word. What, then, is baptism's context in the New Testament? What is this context that modifies its meaning?

BAPTISM'S IMPORTANT CONTEXT

Baptism's biblical context includes faith, repentance (which speaks of decision) and "the good confession" (which speaks of submission). Faith, decision, submission. As we develop these themes, we'll conclude that a baptism with these ingredients adds up to commitment!

(Baptism's context also includes God's contribution to humanity's spiritual welfare. This theme occupies chapters nine and ten.)

1. Faith

If these are the ingredients of baptism, biblically speaking, then we need to know more about each of them. We've already examined faith.

Quite often in scripture, faith is the only response mentioned. Not because repentance and obedience aren't necessary, but because faith represents the rest. (We explore this in chapter five.) Because of the vital relationship between faith and baptism, perhaps you can now see why

we've explored faith in such depths. It will become even more clear once we've resumed our study of Galatians 3:26,27, and spelled out how baptism explains the faith that justifies.

Baptisma is the "total result" of the action. It not only expresses personal, trusting, active and obedient faith. It also expresses repentance and a submissive spirit vocalized in the good confession. And, as I shall point out, baptism is moral response to God's gracious offer of salvation.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. What is repentance, really? What is the import of the "good confession"?

2. Decision

When we return to Galatians 3:26,27 and discuss how baptism explains the faith that justifies, we'll see that baptism is an obedient expression of faith. But obedience doesn't come until one has changed his or her mind, and has decided to be obedient. This change of mind or decision is called repentance.⁶ Repentance precedes baptism (Acts 2:38).⁷

The familiar definition of repentance, to change one's mind, means to decide about something.

Hebrews 6:1 speaks of "repentance from dead works"--repentance from sinful deeds that result in death. When we read in scripture that individuals have repented of their sin, it means they've made a decision concerning sin. They intend to turn their backs upon its temporary pleasures (Hebrews 11:25). They come to baptism with a genuine regret or godly sorrow for past attitudes and behavior (2 Corinthians 7:10). The sequence is: (a) regret or godly sorrow, (b) decision or repentance, then (c) baptism.

When we read in scripture that individuals have repented toward God, it means they've made a genuine decision concerning God (Acts 20:21 ASV). They come to baptism with a different attitude about God's place in their lives. They've decided that they now want God to be in charge.

Baptism expresses repentance, both from sin and toward God.

The dynamics of this mental-spiritual turnabout are lost, however, when Acts 2:38 is translated, "do penance." This widely held concept is based on the idea of paying a penalty for one's sin, of somehow attempting to compensate for one's wrong doings by good deeds.⁸ It's clearly a perversion of the original intent. One can't balance the books, but he or she can change their minds, they can change their attitudes. Like the

prodigal son, they can make a decision concerning their lifestyle and their Father.

Although repentance is an attitude, it does include appropriate action. As John the Baptist said, "produce fruit in keeping with repentance (Luke 3:8)."⁹ A postscript to repentance is found in Romans six: at baptism, we separate ourselves from sin--we're baptized into his death. We'll delve into this in chapter eight, where we discuss baptism's ethical dimension--how we behave.

Baptism is valid only for those who've turned away from sin and toward God. Without these, the ritual is meaningless, a useless ritual. Persons who've not repented should not be baptized. People who have repented should be baptized.

Before we can fully determine what baptism is, we must probe one more ingredient of baptism: submission. After that, we'll find that baptism is moral response--a matter of deliberate choice--and check into why baptism is considered commitment.

3. Submission

The Ethiopian eunuch believed with all his heart that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and said so (Acts 8:36-38).¹⁰ This is, no doubt, what the apostle Paul later refers to as "the good confession." The confession "unto salvation" is an acknowledgement of Jesus as Lord:

. . . if thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved: for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. (Romans 10:9, 10 ASV).

The good confession precedes baptism and vocalizes our desire to submit to Christ, to let him run our lives. Baptism expresses this same attitude of submission. When the apostle Paul told his readers (Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27) that they had been baptized "into" [the name of] Christ, he was reminding them that they had submitted to Christ's authority.

The idiom of being baptized into someone is found in 1 Corinthians 10: 1,2. Israel had been baptized "into" Moses, meaning that she had become obedient to Moses and had acknowledged his authority.¹¹ Baptized into [the name of] Christ means that people have submitted to Christ's authority. In a similar vein, Beasley-Murray suggests that had the Corinthian Christians been baptized into the name of Paul (1 Corinthians

1:13), it would have meant that they had become his disciples, not Christ's. They would have submitted to Paul, not Christ, as their leader.¹²

What does it mean to submit to Christ as Lord? As a former classmate in college used to say, it means to do what he said, as he said, because he said it!

People's response to John the Baptist's message of repentance illustrates submission at baptism. By being baptized, the general public, including tax collectors, had acknowledged that God's way was right (Luke 7:29).

Jesus' baptism was submission (Matthew 3:15). By this action, he made it known that he was committed to do whatever God wanted him to do: he was set to do everything that was right, he was set to fulfill "all righteousness."¹³

For us, "baptized into Christ" means submission to Christ. Some, whose faith in Christ is sincere and humble, do not submit to him as prescribed. This does not, however, change the message of scripture. Equally, others are baptized but are not, by the action, expressing heart-felt submission. This doesn't alter the message either.

We were driving along, enroute to our next call for the church. My friend was telling me how he had "experienced salvation" in his youth. "But," he continued, "I didn't get baptized--I wasn't ready to commit myself." Then he stopped. "That doesn't sound right, does it?" Even at that stage of his spiritual pilgrimage, he'd realized that baptism is submission!

BAPTISM AS MORAL RESPONSE

Let's be negative for a minute: if you have somebody who has no faith whatsoever--there's no input of faith, he doesn't believe anything. He certainly hasn't changed his mind about sin or God (no repentance). Never in his heart has he had any attitude whatsoever of submitting his life to Jesus as Lord. You could "baptize" him all day. Would you say he'd experienced a biblical baptism?

Faith, decision and submission. Without them, baptism is merely a water ritual. Is it possible we've been too hasty in urging people to be baptized?¹⁴

Each is an item of moral response. By "moral" response I mean a response that is deliberate, by choice. Faith is a matter of deliberate choice. Repentance is a matter of deliberate choice. Submission is a

matter of deliberate choice. As we continue, remember what we mean by moral response: deliberate, by choice.

Because of these essential ingredients--faith, repentance and submission, baptism itself is moral response, not a "work," not a "sacrament." Themes we'll pursue in chapter five.

I've often wondered about folk whose baptism was done to them in their infancy, how they look at it. How they react to certain scriptures. This is why I was intrigued by a remark in a commentary on the bible done by "Bishops and other Clergy of the Anglican Church," issued in 1895. A comment on Romans 6:6 reads: ". . . crucified with him, namely in baptism, as the whole context requires." Then this: "If St. Paul's language seems exaggerated, it is because we who are baptized as unconscious infants can hardly realize what baptism was to the adult believer in the apostolic age." Interesting. It also confirms the notion that baptism, in its true sense, is moral response.

1 Peter 3:21 and Moral Response

Two major translations of 1 Peter 3:21 affirm that baptism is moral response. NIV reads, "water. . . baptism saves you. . . --not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God." NASV reads, "water. . . baptism now saves you--not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience." Either way--baptism as a pledge or baptism as an appeal, baptism is moral response.

Please indulge me as I explore these possible translations further:

Both speak of a good conscience. A good conscience may be thought of as either a sincere conscience or a forgiven conscience.

NIV reads "of" a good conscience; the preposition "of" may be translated "from" or "for."

Put this information together and we find that baptism may be thought of as either the pledge toward God from a sincere conscience or as the appeal toward God for a forgiven conscience. (Whether baptism may be considered as the pledge toward God from a forgiven conscience is discussed at chapter nine, note one.)

Either way, baptism is moral response.

Two Postscripts

P.S. #1. An amoral view of baptism--a non-moral view--would mean that the ritual is done without the candidate's having any choice in the matter. This is the situation in the baptizing of an infant.

P.S. #2. Baptism isn't just step four in a so-called plan of salvation. It's not merely an action which follows faith, which follows repentance and which follows the good confession. It's an expression of each of these so-called steps. I suggest that to think of baptism as simply one of the steps, may be to miss what baptism is, other than a ritual.

It isn't just an Anglican bishop writing of Romans 6:6 in 1895 that thinks that baptism was originally moral response. Dr. Martin E. Marty, a Lutheran, of the University of Chicago has written an article in Christianity Today, entitled "Baptistification Takes Over."¹⁵ He uses this term, he says, to describe what he calls "the most dramatic shift in power style on the Christian scene in our time, perhaps in our epoch." What is he talking about? Many who were born into the faith, so to speak, are now welcoming baptism. Why? Because, he says, they see it as a means of choice and decision!¹⁶

Baptism brings together vital elements of deep personal relationship with Jesus:

*My baptism explains my faith (Galatians 3:26,27).

*My baptism arises out of decision called repentance. ("The baptism of repentance," it's called.)

*My confession of Christ as Lord is further expressed by my baptism "into" Christ.

BAPTISM IS SOMETHING WE DO

Baptism is something we do. More important, it's also something God does (chapters nine and ten).¹⁷ Nevertheless, at baptism, we do certain things.

On Pentecost those who cried out, "What shall we do?", were told what to do. In fact, they were urged to save themselves from the evils of the day.¹⁸ A two-fold command had been given: repent, be baptized. True, they didn't baptize themselves, but as verse 41 indicates they did what they were told--they were baptized.

Some have insisted that people do nothing at their baptism except believe, trust Christ that he will be faithful to his promises. We should

do this; as John 6: 28,29 says, believing, itself, is something we do. At baptism, we do something else: we submit to Jesus Christ--the command to be baptized "in the name of" Jesus Christ means we're to be baptized by his authority (Acts 2:38). A report that we were baptized "into" Christ, means, as we've noted, that we've submitted to Christ.

(A baptism into Christ is not such because the one baptizing says, "I now baptize you into Christ" or "You are being baptized into Christ." What he or she says or doesn't say, really doesn't matter. The point is, it's only a baptism "into" Christ if, in the action, the candidate is submitting to Christ.)

According to Acts 2:41, they "were baptized." The passive form, were baptized, suggests that they were physically passive. Someone else baptized them, no doubt. Let's be careful, though, not to make too much of it. They were not completely passive. I say this for three reasons: (a) A command had been issued "in the name of Jesus Christ," i.e., by his authority. They were to do something about it. (b) The third person command (a Greek idiom)--literally "let everyone of you" be baptized--emphasized personal participation. (c) The response recorded in verse 41 indicates personal involvement in the baptism. (Thayer says that "were baptized" is a passive grammar form in a middle or reflexive sense--that is, they allowed themselves to be baptized.¹⁹ A crude but clear translation might be that they that received the word (believed) got themselves baptized.

This same reflexive sense of "were baptized" shows up in Galatians 3: 27: "As many of you as 'were baptized'. . . " could legitimately be translated:

"As many of you as have 'allowed yourselves' to be baptized."²⁰

While Saul was yet on the Damascus road, he was told to go into the city and that he would be told what he must do. What he was told to do was to "arise and be baptized."²¹ And he did.

Not that our part is the most important, but baptism is something we do.

Sometimes people remind me of a group of preachers I heard about. My friend told me the story. It was a community-wide Thanksgiving Day service. The host preacher, who was accustomed to wearing a robe when he presided, offered robes to the other preachers who were to be on the platform. "No," said one preacher belligerently. Finally, the host gave

up. Then the rebel said, "Do I have to?" "No." "Alright, then. I'll wear it." If baptism is something we do, why don't we just do it?

BAPTISM AS COMMITMENT

As we've observed, baptism's context determines its final meaning. Baptism's context of faith, repentance or decision, and submission to Christ add up to commitment. As moral response, biblical baptism is commitment. Baptism's "result," so far, is commitment. The baptism that explains the faith that justifies, is commitment!

What baptism is, determines who it's for (chapters six and seven). When we keep in mind what baptism is, other than a ritual, it also helps us to better appreciate how baptism can be a means to several ends including how it can be an appeal for a forgiven conscience--topics coming up in chapters eight and nine.

Ever wonder why some people's baptism didn't "take"? Perhaps it did take, but they went back to their own moral strength instead of trusting Christ, thus dismissing the help of the Holy Spirit for their lives. (That's what Galatians 3:1-5 is about!) Others' baptism, I suggest, didn't take simply because, for them, it was a mere ritual. It wasn't commitment in the first place.

How baptism, this act of commitment, explains the faith that justifies is next.

How Baptism Explains the Faith that Justifies

We're justified by faith, a major theme in Galatians. According to Galatians 3:27, baptism into Christ explains this faith. Together, verses 26,27 say something like this: "Your submission to Christ--your baptism into Christ--explains [the kind of] faith by which you have become Christ-like [clothed with Christ] sons of God." So how does baptism into Christ explain the faith that justifies? Just this: Submission to Christ at baptism demonstrates that faith in Christ, by which we're justified, means submission to Christ!²²

Faith and baptism have much in common: The faith that justifies is personal, active and issues in obedience. Baptism, too, is personal, active--something we do--and obedience. Submission to Christ at baptism, which demonstrates that faith in Christ means submission to Christ, is akin to "obedience that comes from faith."

By now, you've no doubt recognized that I lean toward the statement of scripture--1 Peter 3:21,22---that baptism (baptisma) saves. But in

fairness we should look at some of the roadblocks that curb this conclusion. Some reject the sacramental concept totally. So is baptism a sacrament? Some consider baptism a "work." Is baptism a work? Some consider that salvation is by faith alone. Do these folk really mean salvation by faith alone, faith-all-by-itself?

ENDNOTES

1. Thayer, p. 109. Thayer also speaks of *gar* as citing the cause or reason for a preceding statement. See also note 22.
2. According to the Galatians account, when did this clothing of themselves with Christ occur? At their baptism: the Greek construction--Greek Aorist tense for being clothed and for being baptized--demonstrates that both actions occurred at the same time. According to Alford's commentary, *The Greek Testament*, they had put on Christ at the same time they had submitted to Christ in baptism. At their baptism, they had begun the process of clothing themselves with Christ. Alford, III, 37.
3. Just what the writer of Hebrews has in mind when he mentions "baptisms" or washings (*baptismoi*) is uncertain. Suggestions range all the way from an exposition of the differences between the washings prescribed by Mosaic law and Christian baptism (Thayer, p. 95) to exposition of the truths and spiritual principles embodied and expressed in the baptism of various disciples. Moulton and Milligan, pp. 102, 103.
4. Concerning *baptisma*, see Clarence B. Bass, "Baptism," *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*. Merrill C. Tenney (ed.) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1963), p. 96b.
5. Moulton and Milligan, pp. 102, 103, confirm the distinction between *baptisma* in which the result is included and *baptismos*, which speaks only of the action of immersion.

In two articles in *The Christian Standard*, Owen L. Crouch discusses the import of baptism's result suffix. "A Study of Baptism" LXXXV (July 15, 1950), p. 10, and "Baptism for the Dead" LXXXV (July 22, 1950), p. 13. One source complains that this attention to *baptisma* as result is "too schematic." Another points out that neither the Latin versions nor the Church Fathers distinguished the terms *baptismos* and *baptisma*. Why is this? We're not told, but could it be because the rite had been so overcome by the sacramental concept derived from the mystery religions (chapter two) that the result suffix had lost its significance?

6. Carl G. Kromminga says that the distinction between repentance (*metanoëo*) and conversion (*epistrepho*, turning to God) should not be pressed. Acts 3:19 and 26:20. Carl G. Kromminga, "Repentance," *BDTh*, p. 444.

Most translations of Acts 5:31; 11:18 and 2 Timothy 2:25 say that God gives repentance. The question is, does He do it directly or indirectly. That is, does He give humanity the (direct) inclination to repent or is it the opportunity (indirect) to repent? Most translations are quite literal. However, both *The Living New Testament* (Acts 5:31) and *Good News for Modern Man* (Acts 5: 31; 11:18; 2

Timothy 2:25) speak of the "opportunity" to repent. Living Bible also speaks of the "privilege" of repenting or turning to God (Acts 11:18).

The context of Acts 5:31 suggests that God gave Israel motive for repentance: He raised Jesus from the dead and exalted him to His own right hand. Thus understood, there is no need here to insert into the context direct Holy Spirit intervention to cause a repentant attitude.

The Revised Standard Version of 2 Timothy 2:25--"God may grant that . . . [humanity] will repent"--sounds like giving people opportunity to repent, not infusing them with the inclination. So also Good News for Modern Man. Goodspeed translation speaks of God's "letting" them repent (not causing them to repent). See also Marshall, I.H., pp. 120, 198.

Since repentance elsewhere in Acts--2:38; 3:19; 8:22; 17:30; 26: 20--is a human response demanded by God, it's safe to conclude that God's part is indirect, an opportunity held forth whereby mankind may live.

7. Rendering Matthew 3:11, "I baptize you with water for [unto, KJV] repentance," suggests that baptism precedes repentance. Certainly the parties being baptized would not be baptized so that they might repent. Another suggestion, however, is that a baptism which required repentance would have a tendency to cause those yet unbaptized to repent.

A better translation, it seems to me, would be that John baptized "on the basis of" repentance. (Greek *eis*, translated "for," may here be an example of the static use of the preposition.) Several versions seem to have adopted this option: J.B. Phillips, The Living Bible, Good News for Modern Man, Williams, and Goodspeed. In real life, attitudes precede--even give rise to--actions. In this instance, an action such as baptism, would probably be preceded by an attitude such as repentance.

8. C.I. Litzinger, "Penance, Sacramental," NCE, XI, 83b, 84a.
9. See also Acts 26:20, where Paul speaks of proving their repentance by their deeds.
10. For textual reasons, verse 37 is usually found in a marginal note. Nevertheless, it seems to reflect a well-known practice.
11. A. Plummer, "Baptism," HDB, I, 241b. Israel's having been obedient to Moses is expressed by a figure of speech: she had been baptized into him. Nevertheless, Israel's physical situation was quite literal: she had been baptized in the cloud and in the sea--enclosed by the cloud above and the sea walls on either side.
12. Beasley-Murray, p. 179.
13. Jesus' baptism illustrates--he is the prime example--that baptism is submission. The conversation between Jesus and John the Baptist (Matthew 3:13-15) yields an unmistakable connection between his baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins and salvation. (Luke 3:3) John understood this relationship and, knowing himself to be a sinner and Jesus not, refused to baptize Jesus saying, "I need to be baptized by you." Jesus was not a sinner; never-theless, his baptism was submission, a pledge to do God's will. Jesus' baptism provides no commentary, one way or the other, concerning baptism and salvation.
14. Southern Baptist author, Samuel Southard, asks why so many Junior-age children are received into churches that practice believers' baptism. Pastoral Evangelism

(Nashville: Broadman Press, 1962) Chapter Two: The Evangelism of Children, pp. 83-104.

Children, however, aren't the only ones who may not be ready for baptism.

15. Martin E. Marty, "Baptistification Takes Over" Christianity Today, XXVII (September 2, 1983), 33, 34.
16. Acts 8:39 reports that the Ethiopian eunuch went on his way rejoicing. Why? Because he'd gotten totally wet? (Which he had.) Not likely. Rather, I suggest, it was because of what his baptism had meant.
17. See chapter ten for my final definition of *baptisma*, baptism.
18. Some object to the translation "save yourselves" on the ground that it requires the act of saving to be done by the persons addressed. "Save yourselves," however, is appropriate: the original word is a command, be saved. Thus the act of being saved is to be done by the persons addressed.
19. Thayer, p. 94, section II.a.
20. Romans 6: 7, which speaks of our having been freed from sin, could as easily be translated, "anyone who has died [to sin] has freed himself from sin." The form (spelling) of the word is the same for both Greek "middle" and "passive."
21. "Be baptized" in Acts 22:16 is a causative middle Greek verb and may be translated, get yourself baptized. A.T. Robertson, A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research. Fifth Edition. (New York: Harper & Brothers, [1931], p. 808.
22. Thayer (109a) defines *gar*, which introduces verse 27, as ex-plaining some previous declaration and indicates (109b) that its force may be "demonstrative."

ROADBLOCKS

Baptism a "Sacrament"?

Many haven't bought in to baptism as a "sacrament."¹ For them, the thought that a ritual--by the very mechanics of the act itself--could be considered an instrument by which God confers His grace, is a roadblock to any connection between the ritual and salvation.

Presumably, a sacrament is a ritual divinely-endowed with saving power, but is baptism a sacrament? No, not if we remember what bible baptism is, other than a ritual. It's difficult to think of baptism as a "sacrament" when we recall that baptism's major ingredient, faith, is personal, trusting, and obedient. It's also difficult to think of baptism as a ritual that in itself brings God's favors to pass (a sacrament) when we remember that another of bible baptism's ingredients is repentance, decision to turn from sin to God. It's also difficult to think of baptism as something that in itself brings God's favors to pass, when we acknowledge that baptism is submission to Christ.

First Peter 3:21,22 reminded us that baptism is moral response to God's gracious offer of salvation. As moral response, baptism is a matter of deliberate choice--something that can't be said of baptism as a sacrament, a ritual that presumes to be effective regardless of personal, conscious response by the candidate. Furthermore, how can baptism be a sacrament when its ingredients--personal, trusting and obedient faith; repentance or decision to turn from sin to God; and submission to Christ--add up to commitment! Biblical baptism is for those who respond, and whose response includes these ingredients.

Baptism--*baptisma*--saves, says 1 Peter 3:21, but not as a "sacrament."

Does the fact that baptism is not a sacrament in the classic sense, mean that baptism isn't important? Some have played down the importance of baptism on the grounds that Jesus himself never baptized anybody. It's true that in the KJV, John 4:2 says that "Jesus himself baptized not." The tense used in the original tongue, however, merely means that it wasn't his habitual practice.² It's possible, though somehow I think not likely, that Jesus himself baptized people. Baptism is important. Chapters eight, nine and ten tell why.

If baptism is something we do, is it a "work"? This is our next roadblock.

Baptism a "Work"?

To hold that baptism is for salvation, many consider a "doctrine of works."³ The prior question is the one just discussed--what is baptism?

Baptism is an act of obedience. Obedience is not a work. In Galatians, as we've seen, works and obedience are treated separately: works are condemned; obedience is urged (implied).

Some deeds may be works, others may be expressions of faith. A baptism that is an expression of faith in, and of submission to Jesus Christ is not a work. If I am baptized as an obedient expression of my faith, who can say that such action, such a deed, is a work? So long as obedience is an expression of faith, it's not a work. Biblically speaking, baptism is not something we do to somehow earn, merit or deserve salvation.

Could some baptisms be works? Yes, of course. As we've said, deeds--any deeds--may be actions of self-aggrandizement. Some people get baptized, not because of desire for a relationship with Jesus but because all they have in mind is that they want to escape hell. For them, Christ is not really Lord. Never was.

Baptism is something we do, but it's not a work.

The major roadblock to accepting First Peter's statement that baptism saves, is the view that salvation is by faith alone. As we said earlier, if we think that faith is a gift miraculously bestowed by the Holy Spirit on whomever He wills, and if we think that we are saved by faith alone, then we will probably consider that no action is needed for salvation--including baptism.

Faith Alone:

Faith-All-By-Itself?

"Faith alone"? What does it mean? To hear some toss the expression around, one might think it meant faith-all-by-itself. There is nothing we can do toward our salvation. Only believe. Obedience for salvation is a work. Insist on obedience in baptism for salvation and you "dilute" the gospel of grace with human effort.

The truth is, no one really believes in faith-all-by-itself. James condemned it (2:17,24). Luther, who introduced the concept of faith alone, didn't mean it that way. (We'll come back to this in a moment.)

In Acts chapter seventeen are three reports of responses to the gospel. Each time, we're told that they believed (verse 4--they "were persuaded"; verse 12--they "received the message"; verse 34--they "believed"). No one assumes that, just because it hadn't been mentioned, that there was no repentance. Even though most people probably never heard of it, they understand the synecdoche principle--"the part for the whole."

"SYNECDOCHE"

This literary device--"synecdoche (sin-EK-dokee)" is a figure of speech by which a part is put for the whole ("fifty sails"--the part, for fifty ships--the whole) or the whole for a part ("Air Canada"--the whole, for a specific flight--the part). In the Acts seventeen example, we have the part (faith) for the whole (faith and repentance, at least).

Synecdoche--the part for the whole--is a common device for referring to an entire topic by mentioning only a part of it. "Hey, dad, can I have the keys?" (He wants the car!) The part for the whole. Synecdoche is used in a number of salvation passages.

Other examples include Luke 24:47, which mentions only repentance. John 3: 16 mentions only faith. First Peter 3:21,22 mentions only baptism. (Why doesn't someone reason that we're saved by repentance alone? Why doesn't someone contend for baptism alone? Why do some argue for faith alone?)

In the Luke 24:47 example, only repentance is mentioned. We all know that total response includes faith. The part is repentance, the whole is faith and repentance (at least). The part for the whole.

In Acts 16:31, the Philippian jailor is told what to do to be saved. "Believe on the Lord Jesus," an example of synecdoche--"the part for the whole." The part is faith, the whole includes baptism (verse 33).

When only one or two aspects of response to salvation is mentioned, we need to exercise extreme care as to what conclusions we draw. For example, do we conclude that repentance is not required when we read Mark 16:15,16? Or do we suppose that Acts 2:38 requires no faith? Or that faith and repentance are not expected in 1 Peter 3:21, which merely says "baptism. . . saves"?

Most of us could recite John 3:16 in our sleep. Jesus repeats the thought in 3:36. Although he mentions only faith in 3:16, in verse 36 he makes it clear that there is more to response than faith-all-by-itself. Those who refuse to be persuaded (translated "disobey" or "reject") will be condemned, Jesus says. In other words, it's faith and obedience. Or better, it's faith that issues in obedience. Clearly John 3:16's reference to faith, is an example of synecdoche--faith, the part; faith and obedience, the whole.

BAPTISM NOT ALWAYS MENTIONED

What about baptism? It's not always mentioned, is it? Because of this, some have assumed that no baptism occurred, then have held that baptism wasn't essential. "See Acts 18:8," they say. "'Many of the Corinthians believed and were baptized,' it says." "But," they continue, "there's no mention of baptism for Crispus and his household!" True, only faith is mentioned. In 1 Corinthians 1:14, however, Paul specifically mentions that he personally baptized Crispus. Luke, in this Acts account, was simply employing the synecdoche principle--faith, the part; faith and baptism, the whole.

FAITH, THE GOVERNING PRINCIPLE

When faith occurs by itself, it's not "faith alone" as commonly held.⁴ Rather, faith is the principle that governs the rest of our response to salvation--it's the part for the whole.⁵ That's why we've said that faith is baptism's number one ingredient.

"In Mark 16:15,16, both faith and baptism are mentioned, but," some declare, "when Jesus tells who will be condemned, he never mentions baptism. This shows," they say, "that baptism isn't essential." Never mind the fact that there would be no baptism on the part of one who didn't believe. The point is that in verse 16 we have an example of synecdoche--faith is the part and faith and baptism (verses 15,16), the whole.

In his book dealing with Jesus' parables, Archbishop R.C. Trench has said that (a) we shouldn't expect every facet of truth to be mentioned in every passage and that (b) it doesn't prove anything just because certain details aren't mentioned in every passage.⁶ A good reminder for clear thinking.

It's strange that no one reasons "no faith required" when faith is not mentioned. It's strange that no one reasons "no repentance required"

when repentance is not mentioned. Is it not equally strange when some reason "no baptism required" simply because baptism is not mentioned? Especially when scripture states in so many words that baptism saves (1 Peter 3:21).

BAPTISM AND FAITH

Without exception, everyone insists on repentance from an adult candidate. Mind you, they cling to their faith alone position by claiming that repentance and obedience are expressions of faith. Why, I ask, is not baptism also considered an expression of faith? Galatians 3:26,27 indicates that it is. In fact, baptism (verse 27) demonstrates the faith that justifies.

1 Peter 3:21,22, mentions only baptism. As we've noticed, the biblical context of baptism consists of several ingredients--faith, decision (repentance) and submission (confession of Christ as Lord). Together, these make up the whole--baptisma. The ritual--what we usually think of when we hear "baptism"--is the part. The part for the whole.

When it comes to no mention of faith and repentance, the synecdoche principle cuts in automatically, even though we may never have heard of it. Baptism's problem is that many do not see it as part of the whole. Possessed as they are by the impression that we are saved by faith alone--faith-all-by-itself, many see no need for baptism.

Faith is needed: "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved (Acts 16:31). Repentance is needed: "Repent [omitting baptism for the moment], in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins may be forgiven (Acts 2:38; see also 2 Corinthians 7:10)." As we saw in chapter three, obedience to the gospel is needed: see again John 3:36 (ASV), 2 Thessalonians 1:8; Hebrews 5:9; 1 Peter 4:16,17 and Acts 5:32. The same sort of language that tells us of the need for faith, for repentance and obedience is used of baptism: 1 Peter 3:21; Acts 2:38; Mark 16:15,16 and Acts 22:16.

We inherited the concept of faith alone from Luther. He meant salvation by faith, not works of human virtue. The works he rejected were expressions of human righteousness. He didn't mean faith-all-by-itself and he didn't mean faith apart from baptism.⁷ For those who have the opportunity, he said, baptism was necessary for salvation.⁸ Unless a person is baptized, Luther said, he is in God's disfavor (condemned, Mark 16:15,16).⁹ He seems to have understood that faith--when used

alone--is the basic principle that governs the entire response. It's the part for the whole.

Some Conclusions and a Look Ahead

Scripture doesn't uphold the idea that mankind is wholly incapable of exercising faith, repentance or obedience. Instead, we're expected to respond in each of these ways. The theology of humanity's spiritual depravity, derives from an extra-biblical source known as Original Sin, and may be traced back through the Protestant Reformation and the medieval church to St. Augustine in the fourth and fifth centuries.¹⁰ Nor does scripture presume that mankind's will needs to be freed by so-called regenerating grace so that we are now enabled to respond to the gospel.

Because baptism is an expression of personal faith, of decision to turn from sin to God (repentance) and of submission to Christ, baptism is not a "sacrament," is not a "work." Isolated references to faith do not mean that our response to God is faith-all-by-itself. It's the principle that governs the other parts of our response to salvation. Each item of response must be weighed according to what each scripture says about it, in relation to salvation.¹¹

So what about those scriptures that tell us of a relationship between baptism and salvation? What do they say and what do they not say? Another topic, however, must come first: Who, according to scripture, is an appropriate candidate for baptism? Who's it for?

Leading advocates of infant baptism admit that no proof of infants can be found in the baptism of households. The New Testament knows no command to baptize infants. Nevertheless, two things in the middle ages brought about the practice. What were they?

Protestant Reformers, other than Luther and the Anglicans, denied the infant's need of cleansing--the child wasn't guilty of Adam's sin. So why did these Middle Reformers baptize infants? Why did Zwingli, who started out with the Anabaptists, who were committed to "believers baptism," later decide on infant baptism?

We'll first take up "infant baptism--three views." After that, "a theology" of infant baptism.

ENDNOTES

1. G.R. Beasley-Murray, however, speaks of baptism as a sacrament, saying that the apostolic writers view baptism as a symbol with power. (262) He rejects, however, a sacramentalism which reduces baptism to the level of magic. See Beasley-Murray, pp. 263-265.
My own rejection of baptism as a sacrament comes from the fact that in sacramental circles the ritual is considered valid apart from the dynamic, personal factors of faith, repentance and commitment--infant baptism being the chief example.
Some who speak of baptism as a sacrament mean no more by it than do those who speak of baptism as an ordinance. Others who choose to speak it as a sacrament may do so because they are aware of the term's original uses--as an oath of obedience, for example. It is important that we listen carefully and in kindness to understand where others are coming from.
2. The tense is the Greek imperfect. If indeed Jesus had personally baptized no one, this fact could be forestall the human tendency displayed later in Corinth to foolishly claim some status on the basis of who had baptized them. 1 Corinthians 1:11-15.
3. It is appropriate to speak of Christ's "finished work" at the cross. If baptism, biblically speaking, be a "work"; then baptism should be shunned in relation to salvation. The question to be settled is whether baptism is a work.
Ephesians 2:8-10 is sometimes cited to verify the perception that baptism is a good work which follows salvation. Verses 8, 9 reject works in relation to salvation, it is true. The tendency to assign baptism to the good deeds of verse 10, however, arises from the prior conviction that baptism is a "work," not related to salvation. But baptism, in the context of scripture, is not a "work."
4. The faith-plus-nothing catchphrase finds wide acceptance, I suggest, because of failure to understand the synecdoche principle.
5. See Brown Kinnard, Jr., "A Fresh Look at 'Faith Only'," *The Christian Standard*, XVIII (August 10, 1963), p. 9. Reprinted from *Firm Foundation*, November 27, 1962. Kinnard argues that there is an important sense in which justification is through faith alone and urges readers to examine the terms before engaging in argument.
6. See *Notes on the Parables of our Lord* (New York: D. Appleton, 1890), p. 41, quoted by Guy Duty in *Divorce & Remarriage* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1967), p. 87.
7. See Jack Cottrell, "The Biblical Consensus: Historical Back-grounds to Reformed Theology," Chapter One, pp. 31ff.
8. Wilhelm Niesel, *The Gospel and the Churches*, trans. David Lewis (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), p. 267, and Edmund Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, trans. Paul F. Koehnke and Herbert J.A. Bouman (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), p. 146, cited in a footnote in C. Ermal Allen, "Faith Only," *The Christian Standard*, CXIII (May 21, 1978), p. 7.
9. Dillenberger, pp. 228, 301. Luther also said that faith is necessary to such a degree that it can save even apart from the sacrament.
10. James I. Packer, "Freedom, Free Will," *BDTH*, 230. See also Gregg Singer, "Augustinianism," *BDTh*, p. 80.

11. Scripture is not so much a theological treatise as it is an account of events and discourses out of the life of Jesus and, later, from his apostles and prophets to the Church. But if it were a manual of theology, what would be the composite picture concerning our human response to God's grace? What elements of response would we find? Faith. Repentance. Confession of Christ as Lord. Submission to Christ at baptism.

BAPTISM--WHO'S IT FOR?

No one questions that the first converts to Christianity have been believing adults--both at Pentecost and in modern missionary situations.¹ The reason no children are mentioned among the baptized of the New Testament, some say, is that there were as yet no Christian households into which infants had been born. Whether baptism is for infant children is questioned, however--at least three major views exist.

Infant Baptism--Three Views

INFANT BAPTISM AND SACRAMENT

The earliest literature of Christianity is silent concerning infant baptism until well into the second century.² Near the end of the century, infant baptism's purpose was considered as merely the time for God to bestow His cleansing and healing grace, not to deliver the child from divine wrath.³ In fact, as Paul K. Jewett has said in his book *Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace*, the nearer the Christian writers are to the apostolic age, the more notable the silence concerning infant baptism.⁴

In his book, *A New Look at the Sacraments*, Father William J. Bausch tells us that infant baptism was "in evidence" in the third century, but that it was some centuries later--by the fifth century, Bausch claims--before the practice became "the norm."⁵ Bausch mentions statements by Hippolytus and Origen.

The New Testament knows no command to baptize infants. No proof of infants can be found in the baptism of households.⁶ Nevertheless, two things early in the fifth century forced infant baptism into the mainstream of Christian theology from the time of Augustine on:⁷ (a) The conviction that children were born in sin (i.e., born guilty of Adam's sin) and (b) the sacramental sentiment that the ritual, as such, would save. So, if you wanted to erase the original guilt of your wee one, you had the child baptized. In the Roman Catholic viewpoint, these two ideas--"born in sin" and "sacrament"--are what make baptism necessary for every adult or infant.⁸

What about infants who die still-born or at birth? They're in limbo, we're told, described as "the baptistry of heaven." (I understand that with some Catholics these days the notion of limbo is in limbo.) That's

somewhat better than the description of unbaptized infants given by early American Revivalists (Protestants). "Babies in hell, not a span long," they said.

But infants can't exercise faith.⁹ What to do? Attribute priestly powers to officiating clergy (a concept known in church history books as sacerdotalism)!¹⁰ Thus personal faith before baptism wasn't required. Faith was by proxy.

As we've observed, biblical references to baptism never place faith after baptism. Supporters of infant baptism, however, insist that personal faith by the candidate, before baptism, is not that important. What matters, they say, is "later [adult] faith." Scripture makes no such distinction. Both are important.

Luther had said that in order to benefit from baptism, faith is essential.¹¹ So how did he, at first, justify infant baptism? Baptism, he said, would be based on the faith of godfathers, sometimes referred to as sponsors.¹² (Roman Catholics had justified baptizing infants, saying that children are baptized in the faith of the Church. [See note 9.] But Luther had rejected the authority of the hierarchical Church.) Luther later said that infants believe, i.e., infants have faith.¹³ It was never demonstrated, but his idea was that through the Word, as scripture is read, something happens.¹⁴ The water of baptism, he said, becomes changed into "a divine element," he said.¹⁵ By the sacrament, the Holy Spirit effects regeneration or produces faith in infants. Infant baptism could not be displeasing to God, he argued, because through the centuries so many saintly persons had been baptized as children.¹⁶

MIDDLE PROTESTANT REFORMERS AND SACRAMENT

Prior to the Anabaptists, the Reformers all agreed on infant baptism though they didn't have the same theological justification for the practice.¹⁷ The Middle Reformers--Zwingli and Calvin--denied that infants were guilty of Adam's sin. Children, said Calvin, were "born saved."¹⁸ They had also dumped the notion that baptism was a sacrament that, in itself, brought salvation. Salvation, they insisted, is by faith alone.

But they baptized infants. On what grounds did they do this?

CHILDREN, PART OF THE COVENANT PEOPLE OF GOD

The underlying assumption was that children of Christian parents belonged, by birth, to the covenant people of God.¹⁹ Calvin even supposed that faith was found in the parents.²⁰

The argument for infant baptism goes something like this: (a) Both Old Testament circumcision and New Testament baptism were acts of reception. (b) Infants were received by circumcision in the Old. (c) Therefore, infants are to be received by baptism in the New. Other than the fact that analogies prove nothing, the argument assumes two things: that Christians today are under the same covenant as was given to Abraham²¹ and that in Colossians 2:11,12 Paul makes some sort of comparison between Old Testament circumcision and baptism. To understand these Middle Reformers, we'll investigate both the subject of covenant and that of baptism and circumcision.

BAPTISM AND COVENANT

As to the first assumption that Christians today are under the same covenant as was given to Abraham,²² it's true that we who believe are termed "children of Abraham" (Galatians 3:7) and that we express that faith in baptism (3:26,27). It doesn't follow, however, that we are under the same covenant as Abraham, with merely a change of covenant signs--from circumcision to baptism.²³ Just as the Old Mosaic Covenant was with Israel--not us,²⁴ so the Abrahamic covenant was with Abraham and his heirs--not us.²⁵ The fact that God dealt graciously with Abraham (as well as others before and after him) and continues to do so with us, does not alter this.

Hebrews 8: 8-12 clearly rules out infants from the New Covenant which Christ sealed with his blood.²⁶ The New Covenant will be different from that made with ancient Israel, says the Lord (verses 8, 9). Citizens of ancient Israel were first born into the Old Covenant people, then later taught "know the Lord" (verse 11b). The New Covenant is the other way around. Those included in the New Covenant will already know the Lord "from the least [not a reference to infants, please!] to the greatest." First, God puts his laws in their minds and writes them on their hearts (through preaching [4:2] and teaching [5:12]). Then He is their God and they are his people (verse 10). This New Covenant people of God are people who've first been instructed. They are not persons who are in the

Covenant family by birth, then taught at a later date. They are not infants.²⁷

The New Covenant people of God are not under the same covenant as Abraham, with merely a change from circumcision to baptism. They're not Covenant family by birth. They've first been instructed--they're not infants.

BAPTISM AND CIRCUMCISION

Concerning the alleged comparison between Old Testament circumcision and baptism, we're told that Colossians 2:11,12 somehow "connects" circumcision and baptism. That Old Testament circumcision, as an act of reception, is "fulfilled" in the "circumcision of Christ"--which is assumed to be baptism. We're told that the circumcision of infants has been "replaced" by the baptism of infants in the New Testament, and that baptism takes the place of circumcision.²⁸

There is no evidence, however, that baptism came to replace circumcision. The text referred to, reads:

In him [Christ] ye were also circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ;

having been buried with him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. (ASV)

Does Paul here connect Old Testament circumcision and New Testament baptism? True, circumcision was an act of reception in the Old Testament. True, baptism is an act of reception in the New Testament.

But does Paul connect Old Testament circumcision and New Testament baptism? The apostle mentions circumcision, but he isn't even talking about the physical Old Testament ritual. He isn't speaking of the circumcision made with hands. He states this plainly. Paul doesn't connect the two, he simply ignores physical circumcision to talk about a spiritual circumcision--the removal of spiritual uncleanness. We discuss this further in chapter eight.

As he is not talking about Old Testament circumcision--the ritual of Old Testament acceptance, no comparison exists between Old Testament circumcision and baptism and the argument for infant baptism fails.

Another feature of this Colossians passage, which denies baptism to infants, is this: Verse 12 states that the person baptized was "raised with

Christ through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead." The object of faith is the power of God, who raised Christ from the dead. Such faith doesn't characterize an infant.

Baptism doesn't take the place of circumcision and infant baptism doesn't take the place of infant circumcision. Despite claims to the contrary, Colossians 2:11,12 doesn't somehow connect the Old Testament physical ritual with the baptism of infants in the New Testament. Furthermore, those baptized are, according to the passage, raised with Christ through faith--an activity not characteristic of infants.

Believers Baptism

Zwingli, a Swiss theologian, started out with the Anabaptists who, because of their commitment to "believers baptism," had rejected infant baptism. Later, though, he decided for infant baptism. The Anabaptists wanted the church to be free from the authority of governments, but Zwingli said "yes" to the state-church principle. If the state and the church were basically one unit, then anyone born into the state was considered born into the state church. This meant infant baptism.²⁹ Zwingli, we're told, wanted to establish a kind of "Alpine Israel" that would include all who lived there.

Now to the Anabaptists. . . they were opposed by both Catholics and other Protestants because they were thought to be re-baptizing people. V. Norskov Olsen says that church officials and leaders pronounced it heresy deserving ex-communication and death. The Medieval Inquisition handed out both. Years earlier, Olsen adds, Christian emperors of the Roman Empire had pronounced re-baptism (meaning believer's baptism) a civil crime.³⁰ At the time of the Protestant Reformation, Emperor Charles V issued a decree (A.D. 1529), based on the code of Justinian (A.D. 529), forbidding rebaptism on pain of death. Key leaders were killed.³¹

Halley says that Anabaptists appeared throughout the Middle Ages, in various countries, under different names, in independent groups, representing a variety of doctrines.³² Their opponents dubbed them re-baptizers or "ana-baptists." They themselves didn't consider that they were re-baptizing anyone; to them, infant baptism wasn't baptism at all. The Baptist movement at the time of the Reformation consisted of several groups actually; the major ones being the Swiss Brethren, the Moravian Hutterites, and the Mennonites in Holland.³³

Three Views

To sum it up, the Three Views of Infant Baptism are:

YES!

YES!

and

NO!

"Yes, because the child is damned by virtue of Adam's original sin."

"Yes. Not because of original sin; but because of being born into a Christian family, the child is already part of the Covenant People of God."

"No. Baptism is only for believers."

When you consider that baptism (*baptisma*) is commitment, what is infant baptism, anyway?

ENDNOTES

1. By the start of the middle ages, adult baptism had become rare. P.J. Hill, "Baptism of Infants," NCE, II, 61a.
2. Bridge and Phipers, pp. 34, 35 and 74-77, refer to statements by Church Fathers of the second century that have been interpreted to mean infant baptism. As we see below, such an interpretation is completely unwarranted:
Polycarp (p.35). We know nothing of Polycarp's age when he was martyred in A.D. 156.* He had served Christ from an early age--for 86 years, he said. This reveals nothing concerning his age when he was baptized, however.
(*"The period of his birth is not known, and we can only determine it by approximation." ("Polycarp," MSC, VIII (1891), 360b.)
Justin Martyr (pp. 35, 75, 76). Justin saw baptism as a means of dedication by persons who are persuaded of the truth of, and who believe in the truth of Christianity. These are not infants.
Tertullian (pp. 74, 75; 82, 83). Tertullian's *De Baptismo* was a protest against infant baptism. That he did this because some were postponing their baptism until just before death, does not alter the fact of his protest.
As Geoffrey W. Bromiley reminds us, statements from these and other early Church Fathers are considered "fragmentary and unconvincing." See "Baptism, Believers'," BDTh, p. 86.
3. Cottrell, "The Biblical Consensus: Historical Backgrounds to Reformed Theology," Chapter One, p. 35, endnote 1.
4. Jewett, p. 69.
5. Bausch, p. 65.
Origen, a church father of the third century, is often cited as favoring infant baptism and saying that infant baptism was an apostolic custom. Pointing out that Origen did

- not appeal to scripture but to custom and tradition, Johannes Warns also cites statement by Origen in which Origen "expressly emphasizes" that persons to be baptized be "of intelligence and adults." Warns, pp. 331-335.
6. Cullmann, p. 24.
 7. Latourette, I, 179. See also Bridge and Phipers, p. 82 and Jewett, pp. 77, 80. The Roman Catholic Council of Trent declared that baptism entirely effaces Original Sin. H. Jedin, "Trent, Council of" NCE, XIV, 272b.
 8. T. M. DeFerrari, "Baptism (theology of)," NCE, II, 63b, 64a. See also Hill, 69. In Roman Catholic theology, a fetus in danger of death should be baptized in the womb. DeFerrari, 66b.
 9. NCE, II, 67a, justifies the baptism of those not yet able to exercise personal faith by (a) "the gratuitous character" of salvation--salvation is by the grace of God, and (b) the "community nature" of the church--infants are baptized in the faith of the church.
 10. Bainton, p. 10.
 11. For Luther, however, faith is not necessarily personal. Baptism, he said, is water with the Word. For Luther, baptism is something God does: (a) The water ceremony--God, by human hands, baptizes. (Dillenberger, pp. 296, 297) (b) The promise--salvation, according to Mark 16:16. (293.1). Baptism, he also said, is not water and my faith. This baptism--this God-accomplished ceremony and God-given salvation--may be received whether the person being baptized personally believes or not. He illustrates this by arguing that the baptism of a non-believing Jew could be genuine. (232)
 12. V. Norskov Olsen, "The Recovery of Adult Baptism," Ministry, LI. (September 1978), p. 11.
 13. Ibid. Luther's view is quoted in an article by Richard Muller, "Anabaptists and Believer's Baptism," Ministry LIX (November 1986), p. 7. See also Luther's attempt to refute claims that infants do not believe. (Dillenberger, pp. 231, 232.)
 14. Olsen, 11.
 15. Georg [sic] S. Steitz, "Baptism," NSHE, I (1892), 206a.
See also Dillenberger, pp. 230, 231.
 16. From Luther's Catechism, as cited by Olsen, p. 12. See also Dillenberger, pp. 231, 232.
 17. Olsen, 10.
 18. See Calvin, I, 363.
 19. Jewett, 69.
 20. Olsen, 11.
 21. Jewett, pp. 81, 82. For an enlightening presentation on "Baptism and the Covenant of Grace," see also Bridge and Phipers, pp. 41ff. See also "Covenant Unity" by Cottrell in "Baptism According to the Reformed tradition," pp. 50ff. The topic of Covenant is also reviewed in an article by Collins, p. 144.
 22. The notion that Christians are under the same covenant as Abraham derives from idea that in the bible there is but one covenant, the covenant of grace, with the Christian Church but a continuation of the Jewish Church [the "Abrahamic Church"] in a different dispensation. Therefore, it is assumed, Christians have "substantially"

the same ordinances; hence, baptism replaces circumcision. Jewett, 89ff., says that the problem is that some, ignoring the diversity between the covenants, read the New Testament as though it were the Old and the Old Testament as though it were the New.

The attention of New Testament writers, however, to "covenant," in relation to salvation, is to two covenants, solely: the Old (Mosaic) covenant, now cancelled (Colossians 2:13-15), and the New, now in force (Galatians 4:24ff.; Hebrews 8:6-13; 2 Co-rinthians 3: 6-18).

23. The sign of Abraham's personal faith was circumcision (Romans 4:11a). Just how some theologians can say that in the Old Testament circumcision is a sign of faith for others than Abraham (eight-day-old baby boys [Genesis 17:12]) is a bit mysterious. Unless it is held that eight-day-olds had either personal faith or had faith by proxy.
24. Among the many lessons Christians can learn from the Old Covenant is that humanity is a "prisoner" of sin, held prisoner by the law--preparing mankind for Christ and justification by faith in him (Galatians 3:22-24).
The fact that the covenant with Abraham and his heirs was "unchangeable" (Hebrews 6:13-18) doesn't--in itself--say that, other than the promise of seed (Jesus) and of justification by faith (see note 26), it was applicable to anyone else. The Hebrews writer's point is that just as God kept his covenant promises with Abraham (verses 13-18A), so Christians may take courage in hope (18B, 19A) because Christ has gone before us into heaven, the inner sanctuary (19B, 20). Whether and to what extent the covenant with Abraham includes us is discussed in note 25.
25. New Testament writers never mention the covenant with Abraham except to recognize its important place in Israel's history (Luke 1: 72-75; Acts 7:8) and to say that the promise to Abraham is now fulfilled in Christ (Acts 3:25,26, esp. verse 26; Galatians 3:13, 14, 16-18, 29; Ephesians 2:12) and that the blessing to Abraham of righteousness by faith (Genesis 15:6) has now come to us through justification by faith in Christ (Galatians 3:6-9).
26. Does this mean that children are outside the Kingdom? Not at all. We recall that Jesus said of children that they qualify for the Kingdom --"of such is the Kingdom." The question of "the age of accountability" lingers, is not clearly dealt with in scripture, and will continue to be a concern.
27. Bridge and Phypers, pp. 63ff., discuss responses to Covenant Theology by those who refuse it and those who accept it--both of whom spurn infant baptism.
28. A.T. Robertson, "Baptism (The Baptist Interpretation)," ISBE, I, 391.
Having decided that baptism takes the place of circumcision, some seem to think of them interchangeably. Thus they read passages about the futility of circumcision, such as Galatians 5: 6 and 6:15, and minimized baptism's importance. By such accommodation, these passages are made to mean that baptism in relation to salvation has no value, that baptism in relation to salvation means nothing. This not only does an injustice to what scripture is saying about baptism and circumcision in 2:11,12; it also ignores what the apostle is saying about circumcision throughout Galatians .

29. Richard Muller, "Anabaptists: the Reformers' Reformers," *Ministry*, LIX (July 1986), p. 12.
Johannes Warns discusses how infant baptism and the state-church principle have affected and altered conceptions of the nature of the church even to this day. Warns, pp. 239ff. Chapter twelve, "Baptism Essentially a Church Question."
In England, the state-church principle operated in the Church of England. Other church groups met "strenuous and regrettable opposition." In order to demonstrate that they were not a "Church," the Army discontinued both baptism and the Lord's Supper. Warns, p. 268.
30. Olsen, 10.
31. Harold S. Bender, "Anabaptists," *The Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, an extension of the NSHE, Lefferts A. Loetscher (ed.) [I] (1955), p. 35.
See also Warns, pp. 117ff.
32. Henry H. Halley, *Bible Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959, p. 893.)
33. Olsen, 11.

Chapter Seven

BAPTISM--WHO'S IT FOR?

(Concluded)

A "Theology" of Infant Baptism

Despite the fact that there is no teaching about infant baptism in scripture, and that there are no examples of infant baptism, proponents of infant baptism insist that scripture yields a "theology" of infant baptism.¹ I suspect that most of these viewpoints were developed after the practice had been introduced and was well under way.

JESUS BLESSED LITTLE CHILDREN

Matthew 19: 13-15 and Mark 10: 14-16 are mentioned. There, Jesus laid his hands on little children, took them in his arms, prayed for them and blessed them. But are we to assume, as one carefully crafted argument implies, that just because Jesus touched people, infants or anyone else, that they received the Spirit? What demonstrates that this event "legitimizes" infant baptism? Jesus neither baptized them nor indicate that they should be baptized.

Moreover, Jesus' applied his comments to adults, not children: receive the kingdom of God like a little child or you will not enter the kingdom. Children already qualify for the kingdom--"of such is the kingdom." If baptism's biblical purpose were merely to identify persons with the visible Christian community, it might make sense to baptize these innocent wee ones. Scripture, however, speaks of several purposes (chapters 13, 9, 10), all of which pertain not to infants but to those capable of faith and needing repentance.

To bolster the idea that infants are appropriate candidates for baptism, we're told that children are addressed in Ephesians, Colossians and first John. These "children" were hardly infants, however. The Ephesian children were admonished to honor and obey their parents (6:1)--a strange comment to send to babies! A similar note is sent to Colossian kids (3:20). Those whom John addresses as "dear children"--literally "little children" (1 John 2:1)--are persons capable of knowing and rejecting evil (2:12-14). They're not infants. The expression, little children, was merely a term of affection from an elderly apostle.

Ah, but Jesus said that infants believe! we're told. In Matthew 18:6, Jesus does speak of "these little ones who believe in me." But before we leap too soon to a conclusion that these little ones were infants, observe: if these children were old enough to believe on Jesus, they were not infants.

OLD TESTAMENT EVENTS "TYPIFY"

INFANT BAPTISM

Infant baptism proponents point to the fact that God dealt with families in the Old Testament: Noah and his family in the ark; Abraham and his family; all Israel at the Red Sea. These instances, it has been said, are Old Testament types of baptism. God did receive Noah's entire family into the ark; Abraham did administer circumcision to (male) members of his family, and the entire nation of Israel--men, women and children--were saved by the waters of the Red Sea. The underlying assumption seems to be that because God related to these family units, He does so today in bringing them to salvation. In other words, His dealings then, typify how God does do business today.

Because God in His dealings with Noah, Abraham, and all Israel dealt with families, which included infants, we today are to baptize infants in the families of professing believers? Is that it? Such a conclusion would be more impressive if scripture itself had specified that these Old Testament events were typical of baptism in the Christian era.

The Flood Symbolizes Baptism

First Peter 3:20 states that eight people in the days of Noah--all adults (Genesis 6:10; 7:7)--were saved through water. Though they aren't mentioned, it's safe to assume that children, including infants, were also in the ark and were saved through this water. Verse 21 goes on to speak of another water that saves--baptism. Friends of infant baptism have sensed a comparison: the presence of infants in this Old Testament event symbolizes, they say, the presence of infants in households that were baptized. This ignores the comparison as stated, however.

The passage reads: "In it (the ark) only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you. . . ." Water symbolizes baptism, it says. The comparison is between the water that saved Noah & Company and the water that saves us. The comparison is not between people, neither the people of the flood nor the people to be baptized. The water of the flood symbolizes the

water of baptism. That's the symbolism or typology in the passage. Nothing here, therefore, to demonstrate infant baptism. (For more concerning 1 Peter 3:21,22 and "Symbol," see chapter nine.)

Israel Baptized in the Cloud and in the Sea

God delivered the Israelites from the Egyptians as they passed through the Red Sea. Does this "foreshadow" New Testament baptism? True, infants were saved from physical death in that drama-filled rescue. But does it follow that infants are to be baptized today? Why?

The only baptism mentioned is that Israel was baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea (1 Corinthians 10:20). Nowhere does the apostle compare this rescue event--which no doubt included infants (verse 1)--with anything else, let alone baptism in the New Testament.

In verse six, a comparison is made--these things are our examples, he says. ("Examples" is the Greek word "types.") But the examples do not foreshadow baptism. "These things"--these examples, are the evil things after which ancient Israel had lusted, not baptism (verses 6-11). The Corinthians were being warned not to follow the example of Israel's forefathers. This is the apostle's point in verses 12-14. The passing through the Red Sea, in the earlier context (verses 1, 2) was not indicated to be typical of anything, including New Testament baptism. As the apostle himself makes no comparison between the Red Sea event--Israel's baptism in the cloud and in the sea--and baptism in the New Testament, no type exists except in subjective commentary.

The Old Testament rescue event did precede New Testament baptism. The apostle did describe it as a baptism. But to claim that the Red Sea event foreshadowed or typified baptism in the New Testament--infant or otherwise--goes beyond what is written.

"GOD DEALS WITH FAMILIES"

The Reformers consistently appealed to household baptisms to justify infant baptism. These days, the usual cliché is that there "may well have been" infants in the households that were baptized. Such fuzziness ought to stop any thinking person from developing a whole theology to justify infant baptism, a non-scriptural practice. But not so.

Our task, therefore, is to run alongside passages cited, to see what has been done with--or to--each of them. A passage frequently given is 1 Corinthians 7:14. But a few others first. Quite an array of scriptures has been brought forward to demonstrate that God deals with families,

rather than individuals. These are cited as "scriptural reasons" for giving baptism to the children of professing believers.

Pentecost

Acts 2:39 confirms "the covenant procedure" of baptizing infants, we're told. "Didn't Peter say, 'The promise is for you and your children?'" But are these children who are to receive the promise, necessarily infants? Let's review the situation. Peter has just told his audience to repent and be baptized so that they may have their sins forgiven, and that they would receive the Holy Spirit as a gift (2:38). Then he tells them: "The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call (verse 39)."

Bear in mind that "children of promise" are those who, like Abraham, are justified by faith (Galatians 3:6, 7, 9) and that God's "children" are not such by birth but by promise (Romans 9:13). Thus we find Peter that Pentecost day saying that the promise is for three classes of people: (a) "you," his immediate Jewish audience; (b) "your children"--their descendants down through the ages and (c) Gentiles or non-Jews (described in Ephesians 2:11-13)--"those who are 'far off'." All would be expected to exercise the same personal faith and express that faith in repentance and submission to Christ in baptism.

The reference to children does not imply "household baptisms" with infants included.

Cornelius

Four facts exclude infants from the baptism of the household of Cornelius, the Roman officer (Acts 10): (a) He and his household feared God (verse 2). (b) They were gathered to hear what Peter had to say (verse 33). (c) When the Holy Spirit fell on them, they spoke with tongues and praised God (verse 46). (d) Peter commanded them to be baptized (verse 48). Infants don't fear God, they don't "hear (understand)," they don't praise God. A command to them would have been absurd. No infants among those baptized.

Philippian Jailor

The Philippian jailor and his household were baptized "in that hour of the night" (Acts 16:31-34). What do we know about those who were baptized? Those baptized (33)--both the jailor and his household, (a) had been instructed (32); and (b) were believers (34). (c) They rejoiced (34).

No infants here, either.

Lydia

According to what we know, who was Lydia's household? No mention is made of infants (Acts 16:13-16). Was she married? Were any of her attendants? We don't know. The only thing we know about Lydia was that after their imprisonment, Paul and Silas met with "the brothers" and encouraged them (16:40). More adults, not infants.

Stephanas

In 1 Corinthians 1:16, the apostle Paul mentions that he had baptized the household of Stephanas. This is cited in a tract to justify a claim that the Church "watched" St. Paul bring in "whole families" at a time (including infants).² Paul's use of household here certainly didn't have infants in mind: later in the letter, Paul tells how this same household had devoted themselves to serving the saints (1 Corinthians 16:15, 16). The household Paul had baptized had consisted of persons capable of such ministry, adults not infants.

(I probably should add: the absence of any reference to infants in these households doesn't necessarily mean that there were no children at home. It just means that the scripture reference is to adults within the households.)

"Family Solidarity in Holiness"

From 1 Corinthians 7:14, it is claimed that the children of Christian parents rank as sanctified and thus have no need to be baptized.³ The question, then, is: Why do infant baptism advocates so often cite this passage to justify the practice?

The text reads:

. . . the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.

The apostle speaks of a believing parent, not parents. But ignoring this, we still find him saying that these children are holy. Children of Christian parents, we're told, are "sanctified [made holy] through their parents." Thus they belong to the covenant people of God (the body of Christ), and therefore "obviously have a right to the covenant sign

[baptism]." 1 Corinthians 7:14 demonstrates "family solidarity in holiness," we're told. In baptism, this family solidarity is considered to be the decisive factor, not the personal decision of the individual member.⁴ Before I respond, let's observe two facts:

1. Whatever is said of the children is said of the unbelieving spouses. a) Unbelieving spouses are sanctified--Greek *hagnizomai*, which here may be translated made holy--due to having a believing mate. (b) Children of a mixed marriage are also holy--Greek *hagios*, which here may be translated sanctified--due to having a believing parent. Both experience *hag* or sanctification. Whatever is said of the children is said of the unbelieving spouses.

2. If being holy or sanctified means that such children belong to the covenant people of God, consistency demands that the unbelieving spouse also belong to the people of God!

Though they are said to be sanctified, unbelieving spouses do not belong to the people of God, they are "unsaved" (verse 16). It follows that the "holy" status of the children, is not a reference to their salvation. 1 Corinthians 7:14 does not support the concept of "covenant membership due to being offspring of professing believers," thus supposedly justifying infant baptism.

Something else we need to understand: being part of the Old Testament covenant people of God didn't mean that they were saved. Only those individuals who exercised personal faith were saved (justified). In Israel, this personal faith-relationship with God for salvation began with Abraham.

So if these references to unbelieving spouses' being sanctified and to their offspring's being holy do not speak of the salvation status of either, what do the references mean? Commentaries vary widely. One suggestion is that the marriage is pure. No need for a Christian mate to divorce or "depart" from the unbeliever--the issue in the prior context, verses 12 and 13. Also, their offspring are pure--i.e., not "unclean," not illegitimate. This, I believe, is all that is claimed regarding children in such a family. No reference here to their salvation or to their participation in the New Testament covenant people of God.

True, in the Old Testament, children did have covenant membership due to birth. But water baptism is not an infant response but the mature, personal appeal of a good conscience toward God.

"Authorities"

I've said that baptism got caught in the cross-fire of theological controversy. It's still out there. Different authorities tug at it daily for attention: not only the authority of our personal subjective religious experience (see also chapter ten) but also the authority of Church Hierarchies (Roman, Orthodox and Protestant); the heavy hand of Tradition; the authority of silence; plus the major ways of interpreting the Bible--the Allegorical, the Pietistic and the Grammatical-Historical Schools.

Justification for infant baptism usually begins with the so-called authority of silence: No direct command for it or example of it, but no prohibition against it.

Tradition should always be challenged; commands of God should always be obeyed. The question for all of us is, where do our ideas about baptism come from? Are they from heaven or are they from men? (See Matthew 21:25.)

So how do we determine what scripture teaches about baptism? Do we have answers already in mind, then seek support from the Bible? Or do we have questions, then seek answers in scripture? The only sound way, of course, is to seek answers. Otherwise, we've already determined the answers, and tend to ignore anything that doesn't agree with us.

Certain theologians, seeking a theology of baptism for the modern period, have gotten into what I call double-talk. On the one hand, they seek a theology based on the authoritative New Testament meaning of the ritual; on the other hand, it should also be based, they say, on what has been termed a "realistic appraisal of the actual situation" (which includes infant baptism, a practice which got under way after the New Testament era). A theology of baptism based on the authoritative New Testament meaning and on the current situation? How can it be?⁵

Summing it Up

Jesus blessed little children, but this doesn't demonstrate that they should be baptized. Old Testament events occurred, but scripture nowhere indicates that they "typify" infant baptism. God dealt with families in the Old Testament; it doesn't follow, however, that he deals with families including infants in the New Testament era.

Biblically speaking, baptism is for those who respond and whose response includes personal faith, decision or repentance and a submissive

spirit. The amazing thing is that anybody ever advocates anyone else as a proper candidate for baptism. Baptism is moral response. Without these ingredients of personal faith, repentance and a submissive spirit, baptism is merely a water ritual.

My concern about infant baptism is this: persons baptized in infancy often become convinced that, for them, no further baptism is expected and never personally experience biblical *baptisma*.

What difference is it that many never experience this baptism? Father William J. Bausch expresses a concern, not restricted to Roman Catholics: In his book, *A New Look at the Sacraments*, Father Bausch is disturbed that baptism in infancy produces only "nominal" Catholics. In fact, he speaks of "millions of baptized pagans" and asks, "How do we break the cycle?"⁶ (The problem is similar, of course, when for adults the baptism is less than commitment!)

COMING UP

It's not only important to discuss who baptism is for. It's also important, as well as interesting, to find out from scripture what it's for. Usually, such a question concerning baptism's purpose centers around whether it is or is not for salvation. Actually, baptism is a means to several ends which will be considered in the chapter that follows.

ENDNOTES

1. See Geoffrey W. Bromiley, "Baptism, Infant" BDTh, 87.
2. Richard Ginder, *Life Begins at Baptism* (Tract) (Paterson, N.J.: St. Anthony's Guild, 1943), p. 14.
3. Cullmann, pp. 25, 26; 43-45.
4. Paedobaptists express concern that a trend toward believer baptism could lead to "unbiblical individualism." See Jewett, pp. 219ff. It is significant that the apostle Paul, after reference to individual faith (Galatians 3:26) and baptism into Christ, which demonstrates the faith that justifies (verse 27; see chapter four), reminds that these individuals constitute a unit--in Christ, they are "one."
5. It's important to understand that theology, at best, is not the same as express biblical statements. Rather, it's a human attempt to explain biblical facts in language suited to a specific era of history. (Though akin, "theology" sounds much better than "opinion.") Theology is human understanding, not biblical revelation. Thus theology is not sacred: it may be correct or incorrect, according to its scriptural base and the accuracy of the reasoning process employed. Thus also any and all theologies projected may be--should be--examined and criticized, including that of this writer.
6. Bausch, pp. 78ff.

Chapter Eight

BAPTISM--WHAT'S IT FOR?

A MEANS TO THE END

Baptism is something we do, but it's not a work. It's moral response to God's gracious offer of salvation; it's our appeal to God for a good conscience. It's commitment. This is why baptism is seen as a means of accepting God's plan for our lives, of making disciples, and of taking our stand for Christ and against sin. It's not only a means to the end, it's the means to several ends.

A Means of Accepting God's Plan for Our Lives

John the Baptist had preached the Kingdom of God. The people were to repent of their sins and make God King of their lives. Luke 7:30 tells us, however, that the Pharisees and scribes rejected God's plan for their lives. By not being baptized, they had rejected God's plan. By not being baptized, as we've suggested, they actually demonstrated something very important: that baptism can be a means of accepting God's plan. Baptism had been intended as a means of accepting God's plan.

As a means of accepting God's plan, baptism is a means of making disciples.

A Means of Making Disciples

In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus somehow relates baptism and the making of disciples. ("Teach" of the King James Version, by the way, falls short of the true idea of making disciples.) As later translations testify, literally, it's "make disciples . . . baptizing them." Assuming prior preaching of the gospel and teaching, what is the connection between baptism and the making of disciples? Before we decide, let's look at something else.

You will recall that the full command also includes teaching them to observe all that Jesus had commanded. "Make disciples . . . teaching them," he adds. We can best understand the relationship of baptism to making disciples by seeing the relationship of teaching to making disciples.

What does teaching have to do with making disciples? Disciples are not the teacher--in fact, they're in contrast to their teacher. On the other hand, they're not just pupils. They're not merely learners, they're more than learners. They've been described as adherents, persons who are

devoted to their teacher. Because of what the teacher is, the teacher controls the pupils' inner lives. The teacher is a mentor, a faithful counsellor. So personal is the relationship that the disciples commit themselves to imitate their master-teacher. This personal attachment shapes the disciples' entire lives.

To some, discipleship evidently meant no more than being just a hearer, but Jesus insisted: only those who hold to my teaching are my disciples (John 8:31). Jesus did not tolerate a loose view of discipleship: "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? (Luke 6: 46)" he once asked. His close disciples addressed him by various terms, each of which expressed a different aspect of the relationship: to them he was teacher, superintendent, Lord, even the more personal term *rabbi*.

So, I ask you, "What does teaching have to do with making disciples?" Before you answer, allow me an observation: the present tense in the original language indicates that the teaching is a constant process. So what does a constant process of teaching have to do with making disciples--adherents, etc.? I can hear some of you saying that it is very important; that it isn't enough just to baptize people, then leave them sitting on the edge of the baptistry or by the river bank. Exactly! The teaching process that continues after baptism is a means of making disciples. Of making better disciples. Isn't it?

The command is to make disciples. A means of making (better) disciples is teaching. Likewise, baptizing them is a means of making disciples. Two participles, providing two means of making disciples: baptizing them--an isolated action (Greek aorist tense) and teaching them--a continuous process. Baptism--especially when we remember that baptism is *baptisma*, or commitment--enrolls them, as Dr. C.H. Phillips used to say, in *The School of Christ*! I like an expression that people in our area use about baptism. They speak of someone's having "taken his stand." Baptism enrolls them, teaching continues to instruct them.

A plausible translation could be: "Make disciples by baptizing them and by teaching them. Make disciples by baptizing them!"¹ When someone approaches his or her baptism as an expression of trusting, obedient faith in Jesus, he or she is signing in as a disciple. If they are motivated by repentance from sin and toward God, they're signing in when they get baptized. If they truly desire that Jesus be Lord of their lives, he's got a disciple.

Baptism is a means of making disciples, of enrolling them in the School of Christ.

A Means of Renouncing Sin and Committing to Christ

ROMANS SIX

Death to Sin

The saints had been reminded that God's grace is greater than man's sin (Romans five). They are not, therefore, free to continue in sin that grace may abound (Romans six). The appropriate response to God's grace is to die to, or to separate from sin.

Romans six speaks of baptism's ethical dimension--how we behave.² It reminds us of the connection between our baptism and our lifestyle. At our baptism, we not only submitted to Christ as Lord--we were baptized into Christ (verse 3). At our baptism, we also renounced sin as Lord. We said goodbye to our former way of life.

Not every baptized believer in the congregation at Rome seems to have understood this:

We died to sin . . . don't you know [the apostle says] that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? (vss. 2, 3).

Or, I dare say, does everyone today understand that at our baptism we renounced sin as Lord.

To understand what the apostle is saying, we must wrestle with what it means to be baptized into "his [Christ's] death." To what does "his death" refer?

It's true that the apostle mentions Christ's physical death in verse nine, but it's also true that he speaks of Christ's death as death to sin. To "die" to sin is to separate from sin. The theme of the entire context emphasizes death to sin, his and ours:

"Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? [Verses 1, 2]

The death that he died, he died to sin once for all . . .

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin . . ." [Verses 10a, 11a)

To die to sin is to separate from it.

Commentators vary concerning the meaning of the statement that Christ died to sin. Clearly he hadn't personally been a sinner. Perhaps the thought is that he had separated from sin by a sinless life and that he no longer felt the tug of temptation once he had overcome physical death by the resurrection. In any event, we too are to count ourselves dead to sin!

For us to die to sin, to separate from it, is to renounce it: "count yourselves dead to sin."

At baptism, we enter into a separation from sin--we're baptized into his death (verse 3). According to Romans six, at a particular point in time (two Greek Aorist tense verbs), two things happened: (a) we were baptized (verse 3), and (b) we died to sin (verse 2). Our baptism and our death to sin--our renunciation of sin--occurred at the same time. This is seen in the statement that ". . . we were baptized into his death."

"His death," that is, "his [kind of] death" is death to sin. At repentance, we made the decision. At baptism, we did the separation. Both could have taken place "in the same hour of the night."

The concept of being baptized into his death is echoed in verse 4, in the reference to being buried with him through baptism into death and in verse 5, to being united with him in his death--literally in the likeness of his death. The new lifestyle--the "new life"--that follows our submission to Jesus and our renunciation of sin at baptism, is also a theme in these verses. Christians are constantly responsible to crucify (to put to death!) the sinful passions of life (verse 6). This is also what it means to die with Christ and to live with him (verse 13).

At baptism, we're baptized into his kind of death, death to sin.

(Sacramental statements about baptism as a mystical sharing in Christ's physical sufferings and death, miss the apostle's point.³ True, in verse 9 he makes a reference to Christ's physical death. As we've noted, however, he doesn't emphasize Christ's physical death. What he emphasizes is death to, or separation from sin--the theme of the entire sixth chapter of Romans.)

At our baptism, we both submitted to Christ as Lord and renounced sin as Lord!

Verse 7 speaks of having been freed from sin (the footnote in the ASV makes it clear that "release" from sinning is the thought, not justification), but this does not mean that we who have been baptized into his death no

longer sin. In verse 12, these same Roman Christians are urged to stop letting sin reign in their mortal bodies. (The New English Bible confirms this interpretation.) Romans chapter six calls for responsible behavior. Nevertheless, the apostle knows that in his own strength the Christian can't measure up. See Romans seven. In chapter 8:1-14, he indicates that God gives His Spirit to help us fulfill God's righteous standards.

Some who've experienced water baptism don't show any real difference in their lives. Does this mean that we should abandon the ethical insight that Romans 6 gives to Bible baptism? Of course not. The culprit is not the baptismal experience. True, a number have been merely dipped in water. In spite of this, those truly baptized--those who have experienced *baptisma*--have received the Spirit (Acts 2: 38; 1 Corinthians 12: 13). But many do not remain filled with the Spirit. From time to time, we Christians need the admonition, to be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). We all need, from time to time, to repent and turn again to God.

Alive to God

The person who by his baptism renounces sin as Lord, is also called on to be "alive to God" (Romans 6:11b)--to let God be an active part in his life, just as Jesus did.

the life he [Christ] lives, he lives to God (verse 10b).

In the same way, count yourselves. . . alive to God in Christ Jesus (verse 11b).

At baptism, we begin a lifelong pilgrimage in a righteous rather than a sinful lifestyle.

By the beginning of the fourth century, baptism was losing its ethical quality.⁴ History records that many church members postponed baptism as long as possible--sometimes right up to the hour of death. Why? So that (a) they might continue their lax lifestyle and (b) so that they might die pure, ready for heaven. The notion had arisen that sins after baptism are remitted with difficulty, or not at all.⁵

A Misuse of Romans 6

Before we go on, I need to deal with what I consider to be an honest but improper use of Romans six.

Middle Protestant Reformers as well as Anabaptists denied any connection between baptism and salvation. Forgiveness does not come through water but through Christ's blood, they said. There can never be,

they said, two means of salvation: baptism and the blood of Christ. Salvation comes only through the blood of Christ.⁶

One has to acknowledge that to be saved by baptism and to be saved by the blood of Christ may sound like two different ideas. But they're not contradictory--both statements could be true, in fact scripture says they are.

My immediate concern, however, is a certain use of Romans six. How does it go, now?

"We're saved by the blood.

"Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins.

"Christ's blood was shed in his death.

"We're baptized into his death (Romans 6: 3).

"Therefore, we contact the blood in baptism."

My concern is the faulty logic employed.⁷

True, we are saved by the blood of Christ; scripture affirms this many times. He gave himself for us. Christ's finished work of redemption was accomplished at Calvary. Scripture's straight forward statement also is that baptism saves. Baptism is our response to grace.

The problem with the argument above is that the term "his death" doesn't have the same sense or meaning throughout. The reference to his death in which his blood was shed, refers to his physical death; whereas the primary reference in Romans six to his death is death to (separation from) sin. (See note 7.) Scripture says baptism saves (1 Peter 3:21), but this faulty logic does not demonstrate Peter's claim.

COLOSSIANS 2:11, 12.

The apostle Paul also touches on this ethical dimension of baptism in Colossians 2:11,12. There he refers to the "circumcision of Christ," which takes place either at baptism or after it. (Greek grammar allows either possibility.)

. . . in [Christ] ye were . . . circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ;

having been buried with him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. ASV

You were circumcised in the circumcision of Christ--what is this Christian circumcision? The "circumcision of Christ" refers to the removal of spiritual uncleanness--his theme from Colossians 2:16 on; see especially 2:20ff. and 3:1ff. To circumcise is to cut away that which is unclean. The circumcision of Christ is not physical--not made with hands--but spiritual. The Tyndale Commentary concerning Exodus 4: 24-26 confirms this idea of putting away all that is displeasing to God, and of dedication to God for the task ahead. True circumcision, we're reminded, is an inward matter (see Jeremiah 9:25,26 and Romans 2:29). At baptism, we put off the body of the flesh. We put away all that is unclean. This compares to Romans six, which speaks of dying to sin, of separating from sin.

Looking Ahead

This ethical dimension to baptism--its relationship to our behavior, plus its being a means of submission to Christ, helps us to appreciate baptism's role in making disciples and in assisting humanity to respond to God's gracious offer of salvation. If baptism is a means of accepting God's plan, of enrolling disciples in the School of Christ, and of submitting to Christ as Lord and renouncing sin as Lord, could it not constitute an appeal to God for a forgiven conscience. In the chapters that follow, we'll consider the subject of baptism and salvation--its pros and cons.

ENDNOTES

1. Alford's commentary, *The Greek Testament*, indicates that the making of disciples consists of two parts: the "initiatory" rite of baptism, and the "subsequent teaching." (I, 306, 307) It does not follow, however, as Alford claims (307), that making disciples by baptizing them means infant baptism. What Jesus had in mind is demonstrated in the Acts record, which tells how the apostles carried out the orders of Matthew 28:19,20. (This baptism by which they made disciples was preceded by preaching, teaching and personal faith--items not characteristic of infant baptism.) Beasley-Murray, pp. 88,89, concurs that the participle, baptizing them, is a means of making disciples. Whether, for reasons of Greek grammar, however, teaching them is also a means of making disciples seems to be a moot point. On the one hand, Beasley-Murray insists that the instruction--teaching them--comes afterwards. On the other hand, he acknowledges that the viewpoint that both participles describe how disciples are made has influenced several translations. Though the grammar for making disciples by teaching them may be questioned, making disciples by baptizing them is a safe suggestion.

2. For a discussion of this and two other interpretations of Romans 6 concerning the connection between baptism and Christ's death and resurrection, see Beasley-Murray, 131ff.
3. See T.M. De Ferrari, "Baptism (Theology of)," NCE, II, 64b, 65a.
4. Slowly, baptism was taking on some sort of magical "efficacy" or effectiveness. (Chapter two)
5. "Baptism," MSC, I (1890), 646b.

6. This viewpoint is discussed by Menno Simons and is recorded in *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*. (John C. Wenger, (ed.), trans. L. Verduin, (Scottsdale, PA, 1956), p. 24, quoted in Muller, "Anabaptists and Believer's Baptism," *Ministry*, LIX (November 1986), p. 9.

It is worth noting that those who insist that salvation comes only through the blood of Christ also insist that salvation comes through faith (only).

7. Without realizing it, these logicians have committed an error in logic known as "the fallacy of the middle term." The term "his death" doesn't have the same sense or meaning throughout the argument:

Christ's blood was shed in his death (physical death).

We're baptized into his death (death to sin).

Therefore, we contact the blood in baptism (a logically invalid conclusion).

Chapter Nine

BAPTISM--WHAT'S IT FOR?
AN APPEAL TO GOD
FOR A FORGIVEN CONSCIENCE

Baptism is an appeal to God for a forgiven conscience. This insight arises from two observations concerning 1 Peter 3: 21. First, baptism is an appeal to God. NIV speaks of baptism as a pledge. The root idea of Greek *eperotema*, however, is to "ask." For this reason, I go with the NASV--baptism, an appeal to God. Second, a good conscience, according to this context, is a forgiven conscience.¹ Why say that a good conscience is a forgiven conscience? As indicated, context is helpful: the main theme of verse 21 is baptism and salvation. Thus a "good conscience" may be considered a saved or forgiven conscience.

As an appeal to God for a forgiven conscience, baptism saves.

Baptism saves, says scripture. Many reject this out of hand. They don't always know why: except that the tradition under which they were tutored, denied it. Besides, they're Protestants not Catholics! Some, having heard that salvation is by "faith alone," see no need for baptism. Others are persuaded that one's spiritual status derives from being born into a Christian family. Yet others are fearful that baptism might be interpreted as a "work."

I'd like to suggest an alternate reaction: wrestle with the thought, if need be, rather than simply refuse it. It's easy, though, to understand why some have refused.

Historically, some have rejected the view that a mere ritual has sacramental "efficacy." In a theological climate of salvation by works--the Roman Catholic sale of "indulgences" being the historical climax of this cynical, medieval expression of the sufficiency of human merit in relation to divine forgiveness--in this historic climax of salvation by works, the Middle Protestant Reformers, in their attempt to restore God to His rightful sovereignty, rejected all human deeds. Baptism, being a human action, got caught, as I've suggested, in the cross-fire of theological controversy. To honor God's sovereignty, they said salvation is by faith alone, and faith a miracle. Salvation is all of God--mankind has no part in it, they said. Salvation is by "grace alone."² It is true that, according to John 1 12, 13, we are born of God. It's also true, however--according

to the same verses--that those thus born of God are those who have received Christ by faith. The unfounded assumption is that faith is a miracle (chapter three).

The two stock-in-trade scriptures that speak of baptism and salvation are 1 Peter 3:21,22 and Acts 2:38. We'll come back to these in a moment, but first consider the following.

Baptism Into Christ

Add to these the reminder that those said to be "in" Christ--a figure of speech that means constantly living in the presence of the Master³--were told by another figure of speech (not that they weren't literally and physically baptized) how they got into that presence: they had been baptized--a verb of motion--"into" Christ (Romans 6:3 and Galatians 3:27).⁴ (If to be baptized "into" Christ speaks of submitting to Christ's authority (chapter four), why should we surprised to find in his presence those who have thus humbly submitted?) This harmonizes with those literal expressions that speak of baptism for salvation.

Observe also that the apostle Paul tells Galatian Christians: Your submission to Christ--your baptism into Christ--has resulted in your having clothed yourselves with Christ (Galatians 3:27, author's paraphrase). A person clothed with Christ is a saved person, right?

To Roman saints, who'd been baptized into Christ, he promises union with Christ in his resurrection (6:3, 5). Union with Christ in his resurrection sounds like salvation.

Nevertheless, you may have wondered if this isn't a pretty heavy load to dump on a mere ritual. But baptism isn't a mere ritual, is it? It's *baptisma*, the "total result" of the action. It's commitment. Because of what baptism is, other than the ritual, I question whether it is adequate to speak, as some do, of "immersion for the remission of sins." (Concerning the mode of baptism, see Addendum B.)

At Baptism, Raised With Christ

Add also the fact that at baptism, through faith, we're raised with Christ. Colossians 2:12 reads:

. . . buried with him in baptism, wherein [at which] ye were also raised through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. (ASV)⁵

At baptism, raised with Christ!⁶

Once again we see the relationship between faith and baptism: at baptism, through faith, raised with Christ.

Baptized "Into the Possession of" The Father, Son and Holy Spirit

Add further the possibility of Matthew 28:19 that people were to be baptized into the possession of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.⁷ Moulton and Milligan, page 451, explain that the expression, "into the name of," is found frequently in the papyri--ancient books written at the time of the New Testament. The phrase into the name of is used with reference to payments made to the account of some one. Applied to baptism, this could mean that people baptized "into" (ASV, NIV [marginal note], Living Bible, Williams translation) the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have been baptized into the possession of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.⁸

Sins Washed Away

Consider also what Ananias told Saul once Saul had arrived in Damascus.

"Get up," Ananias said, "be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name" (Acts 22:16).

Obviously his sins hadn't been washed away before this.⁹ Equally understandable is what Ananias meant. Any knowledgeable Jew would have recognized that to have one's sins washed away meant to be cleansed (forgiven) of guilt. This was its most common and obvious usage.¹⁰

Baptized for the Dead

Even 1 Corinthians 15:29, which many think refers to baptism for persons already dead, may strengthen the connection between baptism and salvation. "Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead?" it reads. Most interpretations fail because they contradict clear-cut scriptures that deny a second chance after death. A more plausible interpretation suggests that the Corinthians had been baptized for the future benefit of their own dead bodies.

Most of us, when we read that some in Corinth were being baptized for the dead, assume that "the dead" is a reference to people. "Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead (people)?" Thus it is considered that some Corinthians had been experiencing baptism on behalf of people already dead. Context (verses 12-19) offers another suggestion. The issue at hand was whether there

was bodily resurrection, resurrection of physical bodies. Instead of automatically supplying "people" (at least in our minds), how about we supply "bodies": If there is no resurrection of dead bodies, verse 29 asks, why are people baptized for the benefit of their (own) dead bodies?¹¹ The suggestion of baptism for the resurrection of their own dead bodies sounds like baptism for salvation, doesn't it? Something to think about, anyway.

As I've said, the church for fifteen centuries understood that baptism was for the remission of sins.¹² Only when the medieval church had developed the sacramental viewpoint, did church leaders begin in a significant way to shun the ritual in relation to salvation. That's when the Middle Protestant Reformers revolted.

One of the silliest objections I've heard against water baptism and salvation is this: "Water baptism saves?" they ask. "Water doesn't save," they say, "water drowns!" What they forget is that those in the ark were said to be saved through water, and that's where the comparison in 1 Peter 3 lies--between the saving waters of the flood and of baptism.¹³ Specifically, 1 Peter 3:21 says that the water of the flood (which saved) symbolizes or represents water baptism (which saves). It does not say that baptism symbolizes or represents salvation.

1 Peter 3:21, 22

Baptism saves. Those who reject baptism as a sacrament, resist the thought. Chances are, all they hear is that a ritual--sometimes immersion, sometimes not--saves. But Peter doesn't say that the ritual saves. He speaks of *baptisma*, the baptism of the New Testament that includes, but is more than a ritual (chapter four).

First Peter 3:21, 22 (NASV) reads:

. . . baptism now saves you--not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience--through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels, authorities and powers had been subjected to him.¹⁴

Funny thing. One well-known New Testament commentator, after acknowledging that the grammar of 1 Peter 3:21 sets forth salvation by baptism, then declares that the salvation mentioned is not "actual [real]." In other words, scripture doesn't mean what it says. He wasn't that different from John Calvin, who promoted salvation by faith alone. Calvin said of the word order in Acts 2:38 that it was baptism, then remission of

sins but that we're to think of them in reverse order: remission of sins, then baptism.¹⁵

Peter gives two explanations which demonstrate, the commentator says, that the salvation mentioned wasn't actual. So what are these two explanations, and what do they mean? Peter's first explanation: Baptism saves, but not as a mere bodily washing--"not the removal of dirt from the flesh [NASV]."¹⁶ In other words, it's not a sacrament, a ritual that in itself brings salvation. Peter's second explanation: Baptism saves, as an appeal to God for a good conscience. (We discussed baptism as moral response in chapter four.) Neither explanation explains that the salvation wasn't actual! Peter is simply stressing the "moral" dimension of the action, not denying the salvation that follows.

The grammar is (a) baptism, (b) baptism saves. Baptism, then salvation. Acts 2:38; 22:16 and Mark 16:15,16 say the same thing. Mind you, some translations and some commentaries completely ignore the grammatical sequence. To be fair to scripture, it must be grammar first . . . then theology.¹⁷

The baptism that saves is response to God: currently the most popular renderings of 1 Peter 3:21,22 show baptism as a "pledge" toward God (NIV) or as an "appeal" to God (NASV). (As I said, because the basic idea is to "ask," I prefer appeal over pledge.) *Eperotema*., the Greek original, has been variously expressed and translated: answer, interrogation, appeal, inquiry, request, pledge or even prayer. Scripture says that that response to God, saves.

Baptisma, according to 1 Peter 3:21, is human response. As response to God, *baptisma* saves. The virtue, however, lies not in our response but in Jesus Christ resurrected and exalted.

SYMBOL

Before we get too far away from 1 Peter 3:21, we should take a look at the concept of symbol. The commentator who declared that the salvation mentioned there wasn't actual, insisted that it was only "symbolic," merely a picture of the forgiveness that had already taken place. And that could well be, if scripture had said that salvation had already taken place. Symbol speaks of two things thrown together to make a comparison. A symbol represents something that already exists. It's a picture of reality. Unless scripture clearly indicates that something is symbolic of something else, extreme caution is advised. One school of

thought sees every event, every Old Testament character as symbolizing something in the New Testament. Typology can run wild; so much of it is within the sensitivities of the one who advocates the type or symbol. What a thing symbolizes must reflect what already exists. You don't determine what something is, by what you think it symbolizes.

Specifically, 1 Peter 3:21 says that the water of the flood symbolizes water baptism. It does not say that baptism symbolizes salvation. The question is, what is the reality about baptism and salvation? What is it that already exists--according to scripture? To express it another way, which happens first, according to 1 Peter 3:21--baptism or salvation?

ACTS 2:38

Following the first gospel sermon, the apostle Peter told them what to do: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins may be forgiven. and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

This apostolic answer has been heralded as the standard call by Christian preachers to their audiences (18), but you wouldn't believe the protests that go up when someone quotes Acts 2: 38.

1. "To make obedience a condition for salvation, is to make baptism a 'work'" (an attempt to deserve, earn or merit salvation by what we do), they say. Baptism is obedience but obedience as an expression of faith is not a work (chapter three). Baptism as an expression of faith, repentance and submission is not a work (chapter five). Obedience to the gospel is necessary to salvation (chapter three).

2. "Acts 2:38 was not addressed to everyone," they say, "only to Jews. Because of their extra guilt in crucifying the Messiah [the Christ], baptism was an extra condition for their salvation," we're told. The long prophesied promise of a Messiah and his Messianic kingdom was now being fulfilled that Pentecost day. Its fulfillment included remission of sins and the Holy Spirit as a gift, conditioned upon repentance and submission to Christ in baptism. But was Acts 2:38 for anyone other than the Jews in Peter's audience that day? Peter answers the question: "The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call."

As we observed in chapter seven, according to verse 39, it was not only for his Jewish audience that day--"you", and their descendants--"your children," but also for "all who are far off"--Gentiles, or non-Jews so

described in Ephesians 2:11-13. These non-Jews, to whom was the promise, are among those "whom the Lord our God will call"--by the Gospel He calls all men (Acts 10: 34-36; 2 Thessalonians 2:14). By its own words, the promise of Acts 2: 38--with its conditions of repentance and submission to Christ in baptism--is for all peoples through the ages.¹⁹

3. "Acts 2:38 is not a 'theological statement'," so goes a third protest. In other words, it's merely an isolated event, so don't build a doctrine or a teaching about baptism from it. Rather than argue the pros and cons of what makes a biblical event a theological statement, I suggest we take another look at 1 Peter 3:21,22. The same apostle who spoke on Pentecost, guided by the same Holy Spirit, wrote 1 Peter 3:21,22. What he wrote there, was a theological statement summarized as "baptism [*baptisma*] . . . saves." It confirms the thought of Acts 2:38 that along with repenting, submission to Christ in baptism is followed by forgiveness of sins.

4. Protest number four is a bit more complex. "In several versions," we're told, "Acts 2:38 reads, 'Repent . . . be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins'." "For" the remission of sins could mean that remission of sins is the purpose of baptism. Protesters admit this. This would place baptism first, followed by remission of sins. "But," continues the protest, "'for' doesn't always mean purpose. 'For' could also mean 'because of.' ('He cursed himself for his weakness'--he cursed himself because of his weakness.')" Applied to baptism this would mean, ". . . be baptized because of remission of sins, because of sins [already] remitted." This would place remission of sins first, followed by baptism. That way, baptism wouldn't be for (the purpose of) remission of sins. So goes the protest.

Several versions do translate the Greek preposition *eis* as "for." Granted, also, "for" in English is subject to more than one interpretation. So what about the Greek text, maybe that will solve the problem.

Commonly, Greek *eis* means purpose. But not always. Luke, who wrote both the Acts account and the Gospel of Luke, twice uses *eis* in the sense of because of.²⁰ This could confirm the view that baptism is because of remission of sins--remission of sins, then baptism.

If English "for" and Greek *eis* are both subject to more than one interpretation, how are we to decide? Are we to repent and be baptized so that (purpose) our sins may be forgiven? Or are we to repent, and be

baptized because of sins already remitted (due to our repentance)? That's the question, isn't it? How do we decide?

Peter himself answers our questions when he writes in 1 Peter 3:21, "baptism . . . saves." The intended sequence is: baptism, then salvation. This is why Acts 2: 38 reads [note the sequence] (a) repent and be baptized . . . so that (b) your sins may be forgiven.

A promoter of missions began his presentation with a brief devotional message. In the course of his remarks he vividly reminded us of Pentecost and the first gospel sermon. The people were touched and wanted to respond. What shall we do? they said. Repent and believe the gospel, was the speaker's reply. At the coffee break, I approached him. As I reviewed what he had said concerning what they should do, he interrupted me. "Oh, you mean where it says, 'Repent and be baptized'?" I turned away, dismayed and consumed by conflicting emotions. Should I have publicly called him to task? Would it have helped? I still wonder.

Scripture says, baptisma saves you.

SIMON THE SORCERER

"The case of Simon the Sorcerer," we're told, "'provides clear proof' that baptism has nothing to do with salvation." Does it? Does it provide clear proof? Was Simon's case different than that of the other Samaritans? Both he and they had "believed and were baptized." So far as we know, he believed whatever they believed. The message to which he and they had responded was "the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 8:12). So how does Simon's situation "prove" no connection between baptism and salvation?

The apostles Peter and John had placed their hands on the Samaritans and they had received the Holy Spirit. Simon then saw something that made him want to buy this marvelous power. For which, he was roundly rebuked: "May your money perish with you!" "Your heart is not right before God." "You are full of bitterness and captive to sin." The seriousness of his sin is clear, but does this prove that his baptism had been useless?

Peter told Simon that he had no part or share in the matter, probably indicating that Simon had no part in bestowing the Holy Spirit by laying hands on others. Peter's statement is not a comment concerning Simon's personal salvation. If the episode teaches us anything, it is that any of us who sin after our original commitment to Christ may have forgiveness

upon repentance and prayer! The case certainly provides no clear proof that baptism has nothing to do with salvation. Unless we're ready to claim that once we're saved, we never commit a gross sin.

Putting It All Together

And so we summarize: Baptism, as a mere bodily washing, does not save. Baptism, as response to God from or for a good conscience, saves. The baptism that saves--*baptisma*--is commitment. It's moral response! It's choice! Biblically speaking, mankind is expected to respond.

FAITH ALONE?

Scripture denies salvation by faith alone. When used by itself, faith is the principle that governs the other parts of our response to salvation--it's the part for the whole (chapter five). We are justified by faith. Our "baptism into Christ" explains or demonstrates [the kind of] faith that justifies or saves, the faith by which we become sons of God (Galatians 3:26,27, chapter four.)

WATER REGENERATION?

To make baptism a factor in receiving salvation, some consider to be "baptismal regeneration." Baptismal or water regeneration could only be claimed, however, if we were looking at a ritual that in itself was presumed to bring salvation regardless of personal, conscious participation by the candidate.²¹ Biblically speaking, baptism is not a "sacrament," so-called. Furthermore, scripture calls for physical actions and human means or responses to be used in the process of receiving or accepting what God offers--though in themselves, they don't "effect" the outcome or cause it to happen. The effective cause of our salvation at baptism is Jesus: it is "by . . . Jesus Christ" resurrected and exalted (1 Peter 3:21,22).

A WORK?

Baptism is something we do, but it's not a work to somehow earn or merit or deserve salvation. When our deeds are expressions of faith, we are justified by what we do (James 2: 21- 24). Such deeds complete our faith. In Galatians, the apostle distinguishes between baptism as an expression of faith (3:26,27) and the "works" for salvation that he opposes (2:16). A baptism that is an expression of faith in, and of submission to Jesus Christ is not a work (chapter five)!

RESPOND!

We're expected to respond to God's gracious offer of salvation. Scripture doesn't uphold the notion that mankind is incapable of faith, repentance or obedience. As I've suggested, we honor God's sovereignty by accepting His grace as it has been offered and by responding on His terms. We're saved by grace . . . through faith.

OBEY!!!!

We're saved by grace, but obedience to the gospel--willingness to be persuaded, and responding accordingly--is necessary to salvation (chapter three). Baptism is obedience--to be baptized into Christ is to submit to him (chapter four). Obedience is an essential expression of the faith that justifies (chapter three). As I said earlier, I'm concerned about those who understand, yet refuse to be persuaded.

THE THIEF ON THE CROSS

"If baptism saves, how do you account for the fact that the thief who was crucified with Jesus, was saved without baptism?" Ashley S. Johnson responded to this years ago. "I account for his salvation," he said, ". . . on the ground that he lived and died before the Great Commission." The Great Commission was given forty days after the crucifixion. The Great Commission, which includes orders to baptize, is the rule. The thief on the cross situation is an exception to the rule. The exception proves the rule; the exception--the thief on the cross example--does not cancel the rule.

Baptism Saves

Scripture says, baptism saves. So if baptism is not a ritual that in itself confers divine blessings (sacrament), and if baptism is not a deed worthy of divine reward (a "work"), how does baptism save?

Baptism saves by Jesus Christ resurrected and exalted, not because it is a ritual that in itself confers divine blessings (sacrament) nor because it is a deed worthy of divine reward (a "work"); but because it explains (demonstrates) the faith that justifies and by which one receives the Spirit, and because it is an appeal to God for a good or forgiven conscience.

By baptism, we appeal to God for a forgiven conscience, we do not achieve it. By baptism, we appeal to God for a forgiven conscience, we do not deserve it. Baptism saves, says scripture, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, now exalted above angels, authorities and powers.²²

Does this mean "once baptized, always saved"? Don't count on it, especially when Romans six, the baptism chapter, warns that wickedness by the baptized leads to death (verses 3, 18-23). Our confidence dare not be in our obedience but in Jesus.

Which is it?

Paul says justified by faith, Peter says saved by baptism. So which is it?

It's both! As a demonstration of the faith that justifies, baptism saves. Submission to Christ at baptism--baptism into Christ--demonstrates that the faith by which we're justified is submission. These topics of saving faith and baptism for salvation really aren't poles apart. Galatians 3:26,27 puts faith and baptism back together.

"But baptism can't be that important," someone says. "Didn't the apostle Paul himself say that Christ hadn't sent him to baptize but to preach the gospel?" Far from downgrading baptism, his comment in 1 Corinthians 1:17 is designed to emphasize the gospel--a major theme of his letter to them (1 Corinthians 15). If there seems to be a

downgrading of his baptism activity, it was because certain Corinthian partisans were using Paul's name to promote their partisan cause (1:13-16). The fact is, Paul placed great emphasis on baptism. His important comments on the subject in Romans 6:1-5; Galatians 3:26,27; Ephesians 4:5 and perhaps 5:25,26; as well as Colossians 2:11,12 demonstrate this.

Baptism is listed alongside the one body, the one Spirit, the one hope, the one Lord, the one faith, the one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (Ephesians 4:4-6). Baptism is important.

One Baptism?

"There is . . . one baptism," says scripture. So which is it? Water baptism? Holy Spirit baptism? Parties who prefer one over the other, often minimize or attempt to set aside as currently invalid the one they least prefer. In our next chapter, I have a suggestion or two which may help us to sort it out. So coming up, it's "the one baptism."

I'll also offer a final definition for *baptisma*, Bible baptism.

ENDNOTES

1. The pros and cons of "appeal" versus "pledge" are discussed by Wayne A. Grudem, pp. 163, 164.
Concerning NIV's use of "pledge": baptism, a pledge of or from a good conscience. A good conscience may also be a sincere conscience. This, then, would mean: "As the pledge toward God from a sincere conscience, baptism saves."
However, in a context of baptism as a pledge toward God, context disallows thinking of a good conscience as a forgiven conscience. 1 Peter 3:21 is not saying that baptism is a pledge from a forgiven conscience. A person of good or forgiven conscience would be a saved person. But is Peter saying that the baptism that saves is the pledge of an already saved person? That baptism saves an already saved person? Such a statement would be self-contradictory, wouldn't it?
Similarly, 1 Peter 3: 21 is not saying that baptism is an appeal to God from a forgiven conscience. This would have Peter saying that the baptism that saves is an appeal to God from an already saved person.
Grudem, p. 163 (third paragraph), discusses the idea that a good conscience is a forgiven conscience.
2. See James I. Packer, "Regeneration," BDTh, pp. 440, 441.
3. W.M. Macgregor, Repentance unto Life, p. 231, quoted in James S. Stewart, A Man in Christ (New York: Harper & Brothers, n.d.), p. 157.
4. Concerning baptize as a verb of motion, see A.T. Robertson, A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research (New York: Harper, 1914) Fourth Edition, Revised, 1923. P. 592.
5. Is it "in which" you were raised--a clear reference to the idea that in baptism you were raised? Or is it "in whom" you were raised--a clear reference to the idea that in Him (Christ) you were raised? Beasley-Murray discusses this and concludes that it is in or at baptism that we are raised with Christ. (pp. 153ff.)
6. Concerning our status as raised with Christ, see Ephesians 2:6.
7. Certain versions (Williams, Living Bible and the American Standard) translate baptize "into" the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
8. Moulton and Milligan, pp. 102, 103.
9. The suggestion that Saul was forgiven while still on the road to Damascus and before he was baptized, doesn't--excuse the pun--hold water. Such an interpretation is not derived from statements reporting either Saul's conversion or call to apostleship (see Acts 9:1-18; 22:1-16; 26:9-18). Rather, the interpretation, which assumes a certain theological stance concerning baptism and salvation, has been read into the context of scriptural record and flies in the face of the usual usage of washing as cleansing from sin.
10. Burton Scott Easton, "Wash, Washing." ISBE, V, 3072.
11. Owen L. Crouch explains this interpretation in a well-written article in The Christian Standard for July 22, 1950, page 13, entitled "Baptism for the Dead."
To translate "their dead bodies [bodies, supplied from context]," is legitimate even though the original Greek text as well as most translations show the definite article "the." Often the Greek article may, because of context, show possession. See Robertson, Grammar, p. 684.

12. See note 7, chapter one. Despite changes in the form of the ritual and the shift to baptism as "sacrament," baptism's purpose remained steadfast over these centuries.
13. Commentators, basing their comments on the grammar of the Greek text, explain the picture: Noah and his family entered the ark and, while in the ark, came through the water of the flood and so were saved by the water on which the boat floated. See Robertson, Word Pictures, VI, 119.
14. First Peter is written to Christians facing persecution for their faith. In the immediate context of verses 21, 22, the apostle encourages them by telling how Christ had suffered to bring them to God (3:18), how God had saved Noah and his family at the time of the flood (3:20). He then reminds them of their own salvation by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, now exalted at God's right hand. To encourage them to continuing faithfulness, he reminds them that their baptism had been, not a mere ritual, but a *baptisma*, a meaningful act of commitment.
15. See Calvin, I, 118.
16. Greek *sarx*, translated "body" in NIV and "flesh" in ASV is clearly a literal, physical reference. See [Eduard] Schweizer, "Sarx [E. The New Testament]," Friedrich, VII, 143. See also Bauer, p. 740.
What Peter denies is, that that which saves in baptism is the ritual in itself, the removal of dirt from the body. His reference to the flesh (or body) is literal. It is not a denial of his initial statement that baptism (*baptisma*) saves. On the other hand, to interpret the reference to the filth of the flesh (the dirt of the body) to mean the filth of the soul denies Peter's express statement about baptism and salvation. (Does, as some have said, the putting away of the filth of flesh mean repentance? This would have Peter saying that repentance does not save. Such an interpretation assumes that "the flesh" refers to sinful attitudes and conduct and ignores the fact that the reference to "flesh" is a literal reference to our physical bodies (see NIV).
17. The subject of a sentence (baptism) exists before its predicate or verbal action (saves). To be completely fair to scripture, it must be grammar first, then theology . . . then application. Then and only then. All too often, theology is determined by our personal religious- experiences and the grammatical sense of the passage goes begging.
18. Marshall, I.H., p. 80.
The 1978 and earlier editions of NIV read, "so that your sins may be forgiven." (See chapter one, note four.) Good News for Modern Man, Williams Version, J.B. Phillips, Goodspeed, and Today's English Version concur in this statement of the purpose of baptism and repentance.
19. Further evidence that Acts 2: 38 was not solely for those Jews who had cried out for Jesus' crucifixion on Pentecost, is that Peter connects baptism (*baptisma*) with salvation in his letter to Jews scattered throughout certain regions of the empire (1 Peter 1:1; 3:21,22). Not all of these Jews had been in Jerusalem at the time of the crucifixion or at Pentecost.
20. Luke 11:32: "They repented at [*eis*, because of] the preaching of Jonah (NIV)." Acts 7:53: "Ye who received the law as [*eis*] it was ordained by angels (ASV)." Among the several explanations given, the passage could read: "Ye who received the law because of [*eis*] its being ordained by angels."

21. "Baptismal regeneration" comes from Augustine. See Gregg Singer, "Augustinianism," BDTh, p. 80.
22. While scripture insists that baptism saves, it's just a beginning. But as a means of accepting God's plan for our lives, of making disciples, of renouncing sin and of submitting to Christ as Lord (chapter eight), it is a beginning. Once under way, salvation is a lifelong process--we're being saved (1 Corinthians 1:18; 2 Corinthians 2:15).

THE ONE BAPTISM

I agree with the apostle Paul: there is one baptism (Ephesians 4:4,3). I'm persuaded that, scripturally speaking, the two collectively constitute the "one baptism."¹ I invite your consideration and criticism of the following suggestions. At the outset, however, I need to set forth some explanations, most of them reminders.

Holy Spirit Baptism Includes All The Spirit's Ministry

First, it seems to me that baptism in the Holy Spirit is a broad reference to all the Spirit's ministry, whatever that may be. To those gathered on the river bank, John the Baptist said, ". . . after me will come one who . . . will baptize you with [in] the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Matthew 3:11). Who is this "you" of whom John speaks? No specific groups or individuals were spelled out. No specific benefits.

In some passages, which are clearly designated as Holy Spirit baptism, there is reference to miraculous manifestations (tongues). Acts 1:5 and 2:4, as well as Acts 10:44-46² and 11:15,16. Holy Spirit baptism, though, seems to have been more than this. It applied to all Christians: ". . . we were all baptized by [in] one Spirit into one body . . . " --in one Spirit we all were baptized into the one Body--the church universal, down through the ages (1 Corinthians 12:13). Here we see that "baptism in the Holy Spirit" is a broad term referring to all the Spirit's ministry. Please note, by the way, that this provides no comment--for or against--on the question whether tongues, etc. are for the modern church. Nor is this our topic at this time. In any event, to be baptized by the Spirit is to be brought under the Spirit's control. In New Testament times, this resulted in some speaking in tongues. For all obedient believers, however, it meant induction into the body of Christ and help for living the Christian life (Galatians 5:16,22,23; plus Romans 8:26,27). The baptism in the Holy Spirit is a broad term referring to all the Spirit's ministry.

Faith — Baptism and Christ-Like Sonship

Second, it seems important to the study that follows that I comment again on Galatians 3:26,27. Together, these verses constitute one sentence, one statement. They speak of the relationship between baptism and faith. The text reads: "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." Verse 27 explains verse 26. The Christ-likeness

of verse 27--being clothed with Christ--explains what it means to be a son of God (verse 26). As well, baptism "into" Christ--personal, active and obedience (verse 27)--demonstrates faith that is personal, active and obedient (verse 26).

You'll recall that together, they say something like this: "Your acknowledgment of Christ's authority, i.e., your 'baptism into Christ,' demonstrates (the kind of) faith by which you have become sons of God." Baptism into Christ is the counterpart of faith, while being clothed with Christ is the counterpart of Sonship. This FAITH-BAPTISM combination adds up to Christ-like SONSHIP. (Holy Spirit help, promised for faith and for baptism, makes this Christ-like Sonship possible.)

Baptisma, More Than a Ritual in Water

Third, I remind that baptism is more than a ritual. Greek *baptisma*, we recall, is an action that expresses our faith, our repentance--our decision to turn from sin to God, and our desire to submit our lives to Jesus as Lord. *Baptisma* is moral response to God. It's commitment. If we don't keep this constantly in mind we may feel that too much is made of a mere ritual. As we continue, remember the *baptisma*!

My suggestion that water baptism and Holy Spirit baptism collectively constitute the one baptism begins with a Do-It-Yourself Exercise, with questions along the way.

A Do-It-Yourself Exercise

All but one of the scriptures I'll be quoting deal with the Holy Spirit. In each passage, another key topic also appears. These two sets of topics have been highlighted in capital letters. For each scripture, the question to be answered is, Which of the two topics occurs first? Galatians 3:26, for example, reads, "You are all SONS OF GOD through FAITH . . ." Which comes first--faith or Sonship? Correctly completed, the answer would be that faith occurs first, wouldn't it?

As you read each scripture, ask yourself, "Which topic happens first?" Brackets have been provided for you to place a number, if you wish, indicating which topic you think comes first (#1) and which comes second (#2). Be sure you know why you chose this sequence.

A reminder: answers should derive from the scripture text before you. Not other scriptures, not personal experiences or anything else. The question at all times is, what does this scripture tell us.

WHICH HAPPENS FIRST?

So which topic happens first?

GALATIANS 3:2: ". . . Did you receive [] THE SPIRIT by observing the law, or by [] BELIEVING what you heard?" Which comes first--the Spirit or Believing?

ACTS 5:32: ". . . [] THE HOLY SPIRIT, whom God has given to those who [] OBEY him." Which comes first--The Spirit or Obedience?

ACTS 2:38: ". . . REPENT and be [] BAPTIZED, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of [] THE HOLY SPIRIT." Which comes first--Baptism or the Spirit?³

GALATIANS 3:26,27: "You are all [] SONS OF GOD through [] FAITH. . . " Which comes first--Sonship or Faith?

GALATIANS 4:6: "Because you are [] SONS, God sent [] THE SPIRIT of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." Which comes first--Sonship or the Spirit?

1 CORINTHIANS 12:13: "For we are all [] baptized by [in] ONE SPIRIT into [] ONE BODY [the body of Christ]--whether Jews or Greek, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink." Which comes first--the Spirit or entrance into the One Body?

Well, how did you do?

What number did most if not all of the references to the Spirit, receive? They got a number two, didn't they? All except the 1 Corinthians 12:13 reference. Right? The fact that most of these scriptures dealing with the Holy Spirit bear the number two indicates that certain things precede receiving the Holy Spirit. So, from the scriptures we've read, what are the items or topics that precede the reception of the Spirit?

TOPICS THAT PRECEDE RECEIVING THE SPIRIT

How about faith in Galatians 3:2? Faith is #1; Holy Spirit follows. In Acts 5:32, it's obedience, then the Holy Spirit. Obedience is #1; Holy Spirit follows. Which comes first in Acts 2:38? It's Repentance/Baptism, isn't it? Repentance/Baptism is #1; Holy Spirit follows. (Before we continue this list of topics that precede the reception of the Spirit, let's investigate another example of baptism followed by the Spirit.)

Acts 2:38 connects the gift of the Holy Spirit--the Holy Spirit as a gift--and baptism. Another example of this connection comes up in a later conversation between the apostle Paul and certain disciples of John the Baptist (Acts 19:1-7). These twelve men were believers. They had repented.

"Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" Paul asked them.

"No," they replied, "we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

"Then what baptism did you receive?" he asked.⁴

The connection between baptism into the name of the Lord Jesus (verse 5), and receiving the Spirit is inescapable!⁵ In fact, were it to be discovered in the light of the above dialogue that they had not received the Spirit at their baptism into the name of the Lord Jesus, it would indeed be strange.⁶

Now back to our list of topics that precede receiving the Spirit.

What about Galatians 4:6? "Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit . . . into our hearts." It's Sonship first, isn't it? Sons is #1: Sonship, then the Spirit.

According to the scriptures considered so far, it's Faith, Obedience, Repentance and Baptism, Faith-Baptism, and Sonship; then the Spirit.

A SCHEMA

At this point, I introduce a schema designed to show the relationship between these various events that occur in our response to God's grace. In columns "A" and "B", the list of items (observe the arrows) that precede the reception of the Holy Spirit looks like this:

"A"	"B"	"C"	"D"
FAITH --> (Gal. 3:2)		HOLY SPIRIT (Gal. 3:2)	
OBEDIENCE --> (Acts 5:32)		HOLY SPIRIT (Acts 5:32)	
REPENTANCE/BAPTISM --> (Acts 2:38)		HOLY SPIRIT (Acts 2:38)	
	SONSHIP --> (Gal. 4: 6)	HOLY SPIRIT	

"HOW DO I GET THE SPIRIT?"

When people ask me, How do I get the Holy Spirit, what do I tell them? Do I tell them about an "experience" I had before I was baptized? Interesting as my experience might be to others and as important as it probably is to me, it hardly constitutes a model for any one else.

Do I tell them about Saul's Damascus Road Experience in which a bright light from heaven flashed around him and the Lord Jesus spoke to him? The problem is, it was only after he'd arrived in Damascus, blinded, that Saul received the Spirit. Ananias lays hands on Saul and tells him that the Lord has sent him so that he (Saul) may see again and be filled with the Spirit (9:17). The scales fall off his eyes immediately and Saul is told to get up, be baptized and wash away his sins. Just when the Spirit came to him, we're not told. Was it before his sins were washed away? Chances are, it was once he had submitted to Jesus in baptism, as had been the case on Pentecost (Acts 2:38). Why not?

Do I tell them how the apostles laid hands on people and they received the Spirit? This would be pretty hard to duplicate, wouldn't it? But in sacramental circles, that's what Confirmation is all about. Once there were no apostles around, church leaders took it on themselves to delegate this power of bestowing the Spirit to the recently created office of "Bishop."⁷

So what do I tell them? How can we know how to receive the Spirit? Why not tell them of *baptisma*? That those who put their faith in Christ, repent of their sin, and submit to Jesus in baptism receive the Spirit (Acts 2:38). This I know.

It should come as no surprise that both faith and baptism are linked to receiving the Spirit. By faith we receive the Spirit (Galatians 3:1-5), and by the Spirit we can lead Christ-like lives (Galatians 5:22,23). The Spirit is also promised those who obey Christ in baptism. Acts 5:32 speaks of the Holy Spirit whom God gives to them who obey him. Acts 2:38 says--if I may paraphrase: "Repent, and let everyone of you be baptized in submission to Jesus Christ, so that you may have remission of sins, and you will receive the Holy Spirit as a gift." By faith, expressed by submission to Christ in baptism, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we begin Christ-like lives.⁸

SONSHIP AND FAITH-BAPTISM

Galatians 3:26, speaks of Sonship and faith-baptism. Which comes first? It's Faith and its counterpart--Baptism, followed by Sonship, isn't

it? Faith-Baptism is #1; Sonship is #2. By combining Galatians 4:6, which speaks of Sonship, then the Spirit, and Galatians 3:26,27, the sequence is: Faith-Baptism--then Sonship; then the Holy Spirit.

Our schema now looks like this (the arrows pointing right show the outcome of each item):

"A"	"B"	"C"	"D"
FAITH--> (Gal. 3:2)		HOLY SPIRIT (Gal. 3:2)	
OBEDIENCE--> (Acts 5:32)		HOLY SPIRIT (Acts 5:32)	
REPENTANCE/BAPTISM--> (Acts 2:38)		HOLY SPIRIT (Acts 2:38)	
FAITH-BAPTISM--> (Gal. 3:26,27)	SONSHIP (Gal. 3:26,27)		
	SONSHIP--> (Gal. 4:6)	HOLY SPIRIT (Gal. 4:6)	

We have one more scripture to consider.

BAPTISM INTO THE BODY OF CHRIST

Now to 1 Corinthians 12:13. Which comes first? The Spirit? Or entrance into the One Body of Christ? It's the Spirit, in which we're baptized, isn't it? Then entrance into the One Body. The Spirit is #1; then entrance into the Body of Christ.

THE FINAL PICTURE

What, then, is the final picture? What's the sequence of all our topics? Faith, which issues in Obedience--expressed in Repentance and Baptism, and Sonship. The Spirit then brings us into the One Body.

"A"	"B"	"C"	"D"
FAITH--> (Gal. 3:2)		HOLY SPIRIT (Gal. 3:2)	
OBEDIENCE--> (Acts 5:32)		HOLY SPIRIT (Acts 5:32)	
REPENTANCE/BAPTISM--> (Acts 2:38)		HOLY SPIRIT (Acts 2:38)	

"A"	"B"	"C"	"D"
FAITH-BAPTISM--> (Gal. 3:26,27)	SONSHIP (Gal. 3:26,27)		
	SONSHIP--> (Gal. 4:6)	HOLY SPIRIT (Gal. 4:6)	
		HOLY SPIRIT--> (1 Cor. 12:13)	ONE BODY (1 Cor. 12:13)

Acts 2 Confirms

Acts 2 provides a postscript that seems to confirm what we've been suggesting. In fact, the topics we've noted in my suggestion seem to throw some light on the Acts account. The early disciples had believed ("accepted the message," verse 41). Upon their obedience in repentance and submission to Christ in baptism, they had received the Spirit (verse 38). And the Lord--by His Spirit, as 1 Corinthians 12:13 informs us--added (to the Body of Christ, 1 Corinthians 12:13) those who were being saved (Acts 2:41,47).

Put more simply, the early disciples had believed. Upon their obedience in repentance and submission to Christ in baptism, they had received the Spirit. And the Lord by His Spirit added to the Body of Christ those who were being saved.⁹

Personal Religious Experience, Not the Standard

There's always a danger that we may equate our feelings or our religious sentiments, with the work of the Holy Spirit. It isn't just theological liberals who repudiate Scripture and base their theology on experience. Many Evangelical Protestant church members are being drawn into modern day cults. The high priority in historic Protestantism is one's personal religious experience, says a recent Evangelical writer.¹⁰ Often it doesn't matter what a group teaches. Evangelicals join up simply because a personal experience is being satisfied--be it an emphasis on family life, an opportunity to express one's self emotionally, or whatever.

What bothers me is not people's experiences. We all have experiences--many different experiences. What bothers me is that our personal religious experiences become the standard. So much so that we sometimes reject biblical teaching. Regardless of how the Holy Spirit may seem to work in our conversion, His activity doesn't cancel baptism's part in salvation as held out in scripture.

Baptisma--A Final Definition

Earlier on (chapter four), we concluded that baptism's "result" (so far, up to that point)--due to its context of faith, repentance or decision, and submission--was commitment. We now see, as we also commented in chapter four, that baptism's context includes God's contribution to humanity's spiritual welfare: remission of sins and the Holy Spirit.

Baptism's "total result," then, is commitment plus remission of sins and the Holy Spirit.

(You may have wondered why I've said little about baptism's mode--how it's done. Equal attention to mode, I felt, might have distracted from the important matters of what baptism is, other than a ritual, and its biblical purposes. Especially since so many tend to define baptism solely in terms of the ritual.)¹¹

Baptism saves as a combination of human response--the appeal of a good conscience, and of divine grace--the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:21,22). At baptism, we commit ourselves to God; at baptism, He promises remission of sins and the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), who brings us--baptizes us--into the One Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13).

We come, at last, to my final definition of Bible baptism, *baptisma*: (a) A response to divine command, Bible baptism is (b) a ritual in water (c) that means commitment to Christ in response to God's gracious offer of salvation (d) so that we may have remission of sins and--as a gift--the Holy Spirit.¹²

Baptism's Two Facets

Rather than ignore or reject either, I've sought to harmonize baptism's two facets--water and the Spirit. I think scripture conveys this union. Obviously, the Spirit is the powerful agent, not mankind. Equally obvious is the revelation that mankind may respond to the divine offer and provision; that, I think, is where water baptism (*baptisma*) fits the picture. What do you think?

By our commitment to Jesus--by our *baptisma*, we invite the Spirit to take control. The Spirit takes control (Romans 8:9); this is baptism in the Spirit.¹³ So long as we leave Him in control (the Holy Spirit is for those who obey: Acts 5:32), He is there to guide, empower and bless (Galatians 5:16,22,23 and Romans 8:26).

ENDNOTES

1. See Beasley-Murray, pp. 167ff. See also Russell E. Boatman, "A Third Look at the Baptism of the Holy Spirit," *The Christian Standard*, CI (May 28, 1966), pp. 7-9; (June 4, 1966), pp. 7,8. This article also appears in the appendix of Boatman's book, "What the Bible Says about the Church," pp. 420ff. See also Leroy Garrett, "Is 'The Baptism of the Holy Spirit' Scriptural?" *Restoration Review*, XXI (May, 1979), pp. 85-89. See also Addendum ---"The Twelve or the One Hundred Twenty?" in David W. Fletcher (ed.), "Baptism and the Remission of Sins" (Joplin: College Press, 1990), pp. 425,426.
2. It is significant that receiving the outpouring of the Spirit did not remove the need for baptism in water.
3. See Addendum A concerning criteria for determining whether Acts 2: 38 speaks of water baptism.
4. NASV and other versions more literally translate verse 3a, "Into what . . . were you baptized?" Even though they answered in terms of baptism, several questions may be asked. When he asks, what literally, "into what?," was he asking into what name were you baptized? After all, when the rebaptism occurred it was in the name of the Lord Jesus. Was he asking, "for what purpose" were you baptized? Paul understood that one of baptism's goals was the reception of the Spirit, something they had no knowledge of.
5. From one perspective, it might be seem that the baptism which they lacked (verses 2b, 3) was Holy Spirit baptism as on Pentecost and in Acts 10, especially since these men were later enabled to speak in tongues and prophesy. Such a suggestion would eliminate any discussions concerning water baptism and receiving the Spirit. Bear in mind, however, that two separate events are recorded: (a) baptism "into the name of the name of the Lord Jesus (verse 5)"--"into" Christ being part of the criteria (see Addendum A) for determining water baptism, followed by (b) the apostle's laying hands on the men (verse 6).
6. Many assume that the Holy Spirit did not come upon these twelve men at their baptism. On the basis of this assumption, they dogmatically declare that baptism is not followed by the Spirit. These men, however, were no different in their response to the gospel than had been those on Pentecost (Acts 2:38). They too were repentant. They too had submitted to Christ in baptism: they were baptized "'into' the name of the Lord Jesus." I suggest that since those on Pentecost had received the Holy Spirit as a gift, so too did the twelve men of Acts 19. Especially since we read in Acts 5:32 that the Spirit is given to every obedient believer. Especially also since baptism and the Holy Spirit are so clearly linked in 19:1-4.
Some have concluded that because Paul baptized them into the name of the Lord Jesus that the only valid baptism is in the name of "Jesus only." It is not clear from scripture that any specific spoken formula was even used at baptism, let alone one that mentioned Jesus only. Actually, in his Great Commission (Matthew 28:19), Jesus had ordered the disciples to baptize into (in) the name of all three members of the Godhead--the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For these Ephesian disciples to be baptized "into [or in] the name of the Lord Jesus" simply meant that it was by Jesus' authority that Paul had baptized them.

7. Bausch, 92ff. Chapter seven is entitled, "Confirmation: In Search of a Theology." Paul K. Jewett discusses Confirmation as completion of infant baptism in the Lutheran, Anglican and Reformed traditions (pp. 185ff).
8. In context, Paul reminds Galatian Christians that their acceptance with God is not on the basis of doing everything that the law commands but faith (3:10-14). In 3:19-29, he addresses a concern that right standing with God (justification) by faith, not works of law, might lead to lawless behavior. (The law had come in "because of transgressions.") Rather, he argues that by faith they had become Christ-like sons of God (3:26,27). Their submission to Christ at their baptism (baptism into Christ) demonstrates the kind of faith by which they are now justified. By this kind of submission-faith, they had received the Spirit (3: 1-5). By the Spirit their lives could now yield the fruit of the Spirit (5:22,23).
9. In Galatians 3: 26-28, the apostle traces this movement from personal response--faith-baptism (verses 26,27) to the social or corporate aspect that follows--we are "all one in Christ Jesus" (verse 28). Once these Galatian Christians had been added to the universal Body of Christ, they were to be found in churches (congregations) in the province of Galatia (Galatians 1:2). Together, in their local communities, they would exercise their functional "membership" in the Body of Christ. (See Ephesians 4:4,16.)
10. See Harold Bussell, "Beware of Cults With Their Evangelical Trappings," Christianity Today, XXVI (March 5, 1982), pp. 42,43.
11. I personally believe immersion to be the mode of the New Testament era. To this, most scholars agree. Some argue, however, that while baptism may mean immersion, it doesn't always mean immersion. Certain of these arguments are quite impressive and should be examined. My own conclusion is that it is not only immersion but immersion only. If this is correct, the question remains, "How important is mode?" If you're interested in the topic of mode, please see Addendum B.
12. Thus baptism is defined as to its nature: an immersion in water, that means commitment to Christ. Its origin is the divine command and human response. Its worth is God's gracious offer of salvation: remission of sins and the Holy Spirit as a gift.
13. Some have suggested that these two facets of baptism--water and Spirit--harmonize with, if not explain, Jesus comments about being born of water and the Spirit (John 3:3-8)
 Greek *gennao* is used of both stages in the New Birth process: the begetting (1 Peter 1:3,23; 1 Corinthians 4:15) and the birth (John 1: 13; 3:3; 1 John 5:1). In our literal, physical birth, we have nothing to do with the process. According to Jesus, however, regeneration (new birth) is (a) God's accomplishment (John 1:13) and (b) conditioned by personal, human faith (John 1: 12; 20: 31; 1 John 5:1). See J.V. Bartlett, "Regeneration," HDB, IV, 219, 220.

Chapter Eleven

EPILOGUE

Despite our earthly denigration or exaltation of the ritual, baptism is a Christ-centered event:¹

He is the object of our faith. It is by his authority that we're to repent and be baptized. The good confession, which precedes our baptism, is acknowledgement that we want him to be Lord of our lives. Our baptism "into Christ" means that we're submitting to him. At the same time, our baptismal experience is union with Christ in his death and resurrection. Our *baptisma* is commitment to him and it is by him that *baptisma* saves. It is his Spirit that takes control of our lives.²

ENDNOTES

1. This is quietly illustrated in the case of the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch. Acts 8:35,36 tells us that Philip preached Jesus to him and that the eunuch asked for baptism. Did the good news about Jesus include what the Great Commission says about baptism? Or was it that the eunuch, having just come from Jerusalem where the new faith was on the rise, was already aware of this detail of response to the gospel?
2. Philippians 1:19.

ADDENDUM A

CRITERIA

Is it Water Baptism or is it Holy Spirit Baptism?

How do we tell whether a baptism passage is talking about water baptism or Holy Spirit baptism? When it clearly specifies water or the Holy Spirit as the element in which the action occurs, it's no problem, is it? But what about passages that don't indicate either element? How can we decide? What criteria or standards are available?

HOW TO TELL--SOME SUGGESTIONS

One overriding criterion or standard is essential: Interpret obscure scriptures to agree with scriptures clear-cut and definite in meaning. Not vice versa. So how do we proceed? First, we examine statements that clearly indicate the element in which the action occurs. Then we seek to apply these in certain obscure passages.

Our first criterion is found in Acts 10:44-48: Water baptism was commanded (47,48). Holy Spirit baptism, on the other hand, was not commanded (44-46). Our first criterion, then: Water baptism was commanded. Holy Spirit baptism was not commanded.

Now for our second criterion. Water baptism was administered by men (Matthew 3:13; Acts 8:38). Holy Spirit baptism, on the other hand, was administered by deity (Luke 3:16; Acts 1:4,5 and 2:17; Acts 11:15-17).

So our second criterion is this: Water baptism was administered by men; Holy Spirit baptism, by deity.¹

TESTING THE CRITERIA

Let's apply each of these criteria. All our answers need to be derived from the biblical text. It's possible, of course, that some scriptures may not yield any answers.

In Acts 2:38, we're told that baptism was commanded: ". . . in the name of Jesus Christ." Therefore the baptism of Acts 2:38 is water baptism.

Acts 18:8 speaks of a baptism that was commanded. Many Corinthians believed and were baptized. 1 Corinthians 1:14 tells us that

Paul himself had baptized some of them. Baptism had been administered by men, not deity. Acts 18:8 is another example of water baptism.

Two criteria! Was it commanded? How was it administered--by men or by deity? In short, is it commanded and how is it administered?

ADDENDUM B

BAPTISM'S MODE--HOW IT'S DONE

The Dictionary

How do we decide the mode of baptism intended in the New Testament? Please don't think me impudent . . . but my suggestion is: try the dictionary. Dictionaries (Lexicons) that deal with the Greek are best since the New Testament was written in that language: Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon (pp. 94,95). Moulton and Milligan's "The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament" (pp. 102,103). Bauer's "Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature" (pp.131-133). Kittel's "Theological Dictionary of the New Testament" (I, 529,539,545). The New Catholic Encyclopedia (II, 54; II, 62).

1. The meanings commonly given are: "dip, plunge," and "immerse"--whether baptize or baptism is used literally or as a figure of speech.

2. Nowhere in these sources is pouring or sprinkling listed for the New Testament era.

3. Three of the above sources mention baptize or baptism in connection with ships that had been sunk or submerged.

4. Both dip and immerse signify bury or submerge.¹

5. Baptize and baptism are sometimes translated "wash" or "bathe," thus specifying the manner of washing or bathing.

Especially in a non-Greek dictionary--be sure that your dictionary is giving you its meaning in the New Testament era! If it refers to the Greek, give it your careful attention.

Baptize is a specific mode. *Baptizo*--I immerse; *Cheo*--I pour; *Rhantizo*--I sprinkle. When the word is properly translated, it is impossible to speak of modes--no one speaks of "modes" of immersion!

The reader needs to be aware, however, that some Bible or theological "dictionaries" go beyond lexical concerns and deal with theological opinion--which sometimes undermines strict dictionary definitions.

Immersion was standard practice for the first thousand years and more, a point we'll spell out when we get to reasons for confusion about the mode.

"IMMERSION, UNLIKELY"

Does baptize mean immersion . . . always? For more than a century attempts have been made to demonstrate from the Bible itself that--while it may mean immersion--baptism doesn't always mean immersion.²

Immersion in certain contexts, we're told, is unlikely. Immersion "can't be proved," they say. Immersion in such and such a context would be "foolish." Regardless of how it's translated, each scripture we'll check uses either "baptize" or "baptism." (We'll only be able to look into a few of the more significant objections to baptism as immersion.)

Because they are frequently cited in discussions of the "Non-Immersionist View," we begin with Luke 11:38 and Mark 7:4.

In Luke 11:38 we're told that Jesus' host, a Pharisee, was surprised that Jesus hadn't washed (baptized). Did Jesus' critics demand that he submerge himself? we're asked. This would be "absurd"; it would be unlikely. I agree. Most likely, however, the Pharisee was complaining that Jesus hadn't washed his hands. The complete idiom is found in Matthew 15:2. Literally, it might be translated, "he washed himself the hands." Did your mother ever say to you, before you sat down for dinner, "Did you wash?" She didn't mean, did you take a bath. You knew exactly what she meant: did you wash your hands? The whole statement doesn't have to be expressed, to understand what's meant.

Baptize simply indicates the mode of washing: Jesus hadn't washed his hands--by dipping them under water.

The same theme is found in Mark 7:1-5. In verse 4, we read that the Pharisees "washed" themselves before they ate. We're told that it would be hard to imagine even a Pharisee completely submerging himself before he ate. I agree. What we have here is the same incomplete expression: they washed themselves the hands--hands being understood. Actually the

earlier context suggests this--the Pharisees and teachers of the law had seen Jesus' disciples eating with "unclean," that is unwashed hands.

"IMMERSION, IMPOSSIBLE"

The consensus here is that baptism as immersion, in certain biblical contexts, is impossible--immersion "cannot" be, or the mode "must" be something else, or it does "not mean immersion."

A favorite passage of those who refuse immersion is Leviticus 14:6 and 51. This speaks of a ritual for the cleansing of a leper and his house: a priest dips (*bapto*, Septuagint) a living bird, and other items, in the blood of a slain bird, presumably of the same kind. This "cannot" mean immersion, we're told: a living bird cannot be immersed--totally dipped--in the blood of another bird of similar kind.

And this is true. You simply wouldn't have enough blood.

But total immersion is possible--not "absurd," but quite likely! Verse six tells us that the first bird was to be killed over fresh water. This meant that the blood flowed into the water. The live bird, was then dipped in this blood-and-water combination. Total immersion is possible. Verse 51 concurs.

Hebrews 9:10 has been compared to verses 19 and 21. The "baptisms" of verse 10--the "various ceremonial washings (*baptismo*)"--could not be considered immersions, we're told. Such would be "un-thinkable." Why? Because, it is claimed, these baptisms (washings) of verse 10 "must surely include" the sprinklings of verses 19 and 21.

Let's look at it more carefully. Verse 10 is a reference to customary practices. Verses 19 and 21, by contrast, refer to a specific historic situation--that occasion when Moses had come down from Mount Sinai and had "sprinkled the scroll and all the people [as well as] the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies." Two different situations. There is no way the ceremonial washings of vs. 10 (customary practice) includes the 'sprinkling' of verses 19 and 21 (a specific historic situation)!

In Acts, we have several references to baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Concerning Pentecost, we have 1:5 where Jesus promises his disciples, ". . . in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." After this

happens, Peter quotes the prophecy of Joel, where the Lord God says that He will "pour out" His Spirit on all people (2:17,18). That which was promised (Acts one) as a baptism is, when it is fulfilled, referred to as a pouring (Acts two).

The second reference to the baptism in the Holy Spirit is the household of Cornelius. 10:44 tells how ". . . the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message"--literally it "fell" on them as in being poured. Verse 45 speaks of the same happening as the Holy Spirit's having been "poured" out. When the event is reported back in Jerusalem, it's classed as a baptism (11: 16). Baptize and pour have been used interchangeably.

Therefore, it has been concluded, baptism is pouring!¹⁰

What we have here is two different figures of speech: baptized in the Spirit; the Spirit poured out. Both mean the same thing: the Spirit came to them and overwhelmed them, took control of them. The assumption is that figures of speech, which mean the same thing, always have the same literal meaning. But do they? No.

I saw a cartoon one time. The dog is curled up on his master's favorite chair. The man approaches the chair. "Come off," he says. The dog doesn't move. "Come on," the master insists. The dog says, "Make up your mind." The dog knew that literally "come off" and "come on" mean two different things. But the master understood that figuratively they meant the same thing: Move!

Words, as figures of speech, may mean the same thing: but literally, each might have its own meaning--each could have its own literal meaning. Literally, baptize does not mean pour--just because in this context they mean the same thing, figuratively.

WHY ALL THE CONFUSION?

With the greater part of Christendom today not having been immersed, one might easily think that immersion has always been a loser. If you take a look at history, however, I think you'll be amazed.³

In the Western Church (Roman), immersion continued generally up until the Middle ages.⁴ In the Eastern Church (Greek), immersion has been practiced for 2,000 years.

Sprinkling was not in general use until the thirteenth century (the 1200's).⁵ Formal substitution of pouring or sprinkling for immersion didn't occur until the Roman Catholic Council of Trent in the 1500's.⁶

In the early Protestant Reformation, which got under way in the first half of the 1500's, Luther referred to baptism as immersion but practiced washing with the hand.⁷ John Calvin indicated that immersion was the practice of the primitive church⁸ but practiced pouring, then sprinkling. The Presbyterian Church in Geneva, became the first Protestant church to command sprinkling.⁹ Anabaptist leaders were drowned or burned at the stake for "re-baptizing" persons either poured or sprinkled in infancy.¹⁰

Prior to 1643, for 100 years, the Church of England, the Presbyterian Church and Independent (Congregational) Churches--had all practiced immersion.¹¹ In spite of that, in 1643, the Westminster Assembly voted 24 to 24--with Chairman Lightfoot casting the deciding vote--in favor of sprinkling.¹²

Why is there such confusion concerning the mode of baptism? I have two suggestions. First, the noun baptism (Greek *baptisma*) and the verb baptize (Greek *baptizo*) have never been translated into English, only transliterated. This means that letters of the English alphabet merely replace the Greek letters. The so-called "King James Version" of the Bible was issued in 1611. His Majesty King James had authorized the bishops to do the translation in the everyday speech of that day. At the time, immersion was the "law of the land"--the Church of England was the state-church. A significant number of bishops, however, wanted to get rid of this "demon of immersion," as they called it. In fact, only thirty-two years later, these same bishops voted in sprinkling. You can see why *baptisma* and *baptizo* never got translated in 1611!

The second reason for the modern confusion about the mode of baptism is that theological authority figures in times past have waffled. For example, John Calvin, whose influence still hovers over the church, stated clearly that the word baptize means to immerse. He also added that immersion was the practice of the ancient church. He stated, nevertheless, that whether the person be wholly immersed or whether water only be poured or sprinkled upon him is of no importance. Churches ought, he said, to be left at liberty to act according to the difference of the countries.¹³ For Calvin, the tradition of the local area determines just exactly what one should do in this matter. Luther is

equally clear as to the original meaning. Within one paragraph he states (a) that baptism was instituted by Christ in the form of total immersion, but (b) that he doesn't consider it necessary to undergo this form.¹⁴ The normal authorities, such as dictionaries or Scripture, didn't seem to make that great an impression on these men on this topic. Nevertheless, they've left their impression on myriads of others.

ENDNOTES

1. Due to various contexts in which baptize/baptism is found in secular Greek writings, the fundamental notion of submerge is variously translated: wash, plunge, sink, drench, overwhelm, soak, drown, dye, etc. See Bauer, pp. 131-133, for more detailed discussion.
2. For current works dealing with this viewpoint, see Herbert Mjorud, "What's Baptism All About?" (Carol Stream, IL: Creation House, 1978), chapters seven and eight; John Murray, "Christian Baptism" (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1977), chapter two; Robert Rayburn, "What about Baptism?" (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1957), chapters 2-5.
3. The reader is advised to observe carefully how the expression, "the early church," is used. Certain encyclopedia articles state that "the early church" unhesitatingly accepted pouring (or sprinkling) as equally valid with immersion. At first glance, these articles might seem to refer to the apostolic church of the New Testament era. Examination reveals, however, that they often include statements from or about second or third century Church Fathers, who followed the apostles. The writings of Church Fathers in general are important. They come from eras when the church was defining what it believed, but they are not authoritative like the New Testament.
4. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, "Baptism," BDTh, p. 83.
5. J.A. Jungman, "Baptism (Liturgy of)," NCE, II, 59, reports that, according to Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), complete immersion was "the more common practice."
6. A.T. Robertson, "Baptism (The Baptist Interpretation)," ISBE, I (1915), 386b.
7. Mjorud, p. 53.
8. Hugh T. Kerr (ed), "A Compend of the Institutes of the Christian Religion" by John Calvin. Book IV, Section xv, Paragraph 19. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1939), pp. 193, 194.
9. Wall, [History of Infant Baptism], quoted in Wilson, p. 16.
10. Richard Muller, "Anabaptists: The Reformers' Reformers," Ministry, LIX (July 1986), p. 13. Luther, after 1528, along with many other Reformers, felt that such "heretics" should be punished by civil authorities.
11. Wilson, p.11.
12. Edinburg Ency[clopedia], III, 236, quoted in Wilson, 12, 13.
13. Kerr, pp. 194.
14. Dillenberger, p. 302. See also pp. 279, 296, 298, 301, 303.

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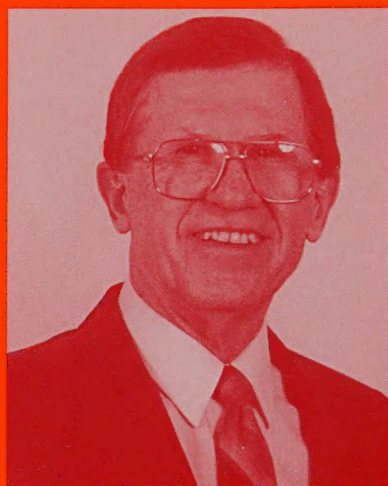
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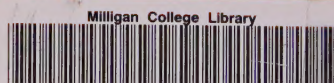
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ISBN 1-56794-074-9



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